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The Best British
Short Stories of 1924

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN — JOHN CURNOS

**THE BEST
BRITISH SHORT STORIES
OF 1924**

THE BEST BRITISH SHORT STORIES OF 1924

EDITED BY
EDWARD J. O'BRIEN
AND
JOHN COURNOS



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TO
A. E. COPPARD

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If we have overlooked any name in these acknowledgments, it has been through inadvertence, and we trust that the error will be overlooked.

We shall be grateful for suggestions from readers of this series, and shall particularly welcome the receipt of stories of merit which appear during the coming year in periodicals that do not come under our regular notice. Such communications may be addressed to *Edward J. O'Brien, care of Jonathan Cape, 11 Gower Street, London, W. C., England.*

E. J. O.
J. C.

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INTRODUCTION

I

THE *Anthologist* AND *Critical Reader* DISCUSS THE SHORT STORY

C. R. It's about time, Mr. Cournos, that you and Mr. O'Brien should give us some idea of what you mean by a short story. I want a precise definition, a set of principles, if you like. You have been dodging the issue long enough.

A. I have been expecting you to say that. I do not deny your right to make a demand. Still, I must plead justification.

C. R. For what? Every art, I take it, has its principles, and I do not see why the principles of the art of the short story should not be stated clearly and precisely, without pleas of any sort.

A. All that sounds very well, my friend, but you do not appear to quite appreciate our position. There are some questions to which one cannot answer simply. Yes or No. The whole world is a complicated, tangled affair today, and the art of the short story is as complicated and as tangled as the rest of it.

C. R. Do you mean to say that it was possible once to define a short story and that it is impossible now?

A. Yes, that is more or less the case. The world had once a kind of creative unity. Indeed, I doubt whether it could have occurred to any one to ask such a question once. It had been simply a case of "Tell me a story . . ." The world well knew what that meant. The very fact that you ask me for a definition shows that something has happened to the modern short story.

C. R. That is so. What you mean is that tales as wide apart as those of the Arabian Nights or of Boccaccio were so palpably short stories that one didn't stop to ask questions.

A. Very good. I see you have caught my meaning.

They were tales in that they could have been told by word of mouth.

C. R. Well, well, I hadn't thought of that. Short stories by so-called best writers today certainly don't stand that test. That is odd, indeed. I am second to none in my admiration of Henry James and Katherine Mansfield, yet I must confess that their best short stories, so technically perfect, will not admit of repeating by word of mouth, which is perhaps the first principle of story-telling.

A. Yes, a new consciousness is developing—a consciousness, perhaps, which has little relation to first principles—and this consciousness is so many-faceted, so diverse, that not one of us dare venture to suggest that his truth, his own specific clairvoyance, is the only one that matters. You will remember that I once stated that there are nowadays as many sets of principles as there are short story writers. Now, I may have my own idea of what a short story should be, but if I attempted to set it down the critics would at once pounce upon me and say that I was “pontificating.” Indeed, they have said as much, though I have not made such an attempt.

C. R. Never mind the critics! You know that you cannot please everybody. Some people are bound to be annoyed no matter what you attempt to say. Since you are shy of critics, you might give your idea, and as you are a professional writer and I but a layman I am bound to respect your opinion, even if I do not quite agree with you. You cannot blame us laymen for refusing to accept authority, since you yourself admit that there is no longer such a thing in this disjointed world.

A. No, there is no longer any authority, and every man writing is law unto himself. On this basis, I am willing to discuss matters with you.

C. R. As a beginning, I must insist that you give your definition of a short story. Your collaborator's requirements, which he voices in such phrases as “criticism of life,” “organic substance” and “form,” while good as far as they go, are not sufficiently precise; since, I take it, that they should apply equally to a novel or any other form of literary art.

A. Yes, that is a point well taken. I am glad you have mentioned the novel, as I think I can make my definition clearer by a comparison of the two arts. A novel is, or should be, a development of plot, character or atmosphere, or, in the case of great art, of all three; but a short story is seldom development, and nearly always culmination. It is always a dramatic, an emotional highlight, a cumulative, a concentric moment, which may suggest but never state the dragging progression that led up to it. It may be, indeed, a series of such moments, as when the bud bursts into the blossom, and the blossom into the full flower. It is at such moments that the reader of the short story bursts in upon his garden, but the novel reader watches its slow development and growing from the seed to the flower.

C. R. You talk in parables!

A. I was not aware of it. But I am glad you have mentioned parables. A parable is a short story *ad summum*. It is the last word in story telling. And nearly always it represents a lifetime compressed into an instant, or a series of instants, all tense and dramatic, concentric in their effect.

C. R. I should be glad of an illustration.

A. By all means. There is the parable of the Prodigal Son. Can you think of a more superb short story in any language?

C. R. I must confess, no.

A. Well, then. Consider it. I am not referring to its qualities of love, pity, irony, or those qualities which my collaborator would call "A criticism of life"; but to its specific qualities as a short story.

C. R. Surely no one can doubt that it is short!

A. And yet, my friend, short as it is, there are three great highlights, three dramatic episodes, three concentric moments, in this very short story.

C. R. Three?

A. Yes, three. There is the prodigal's repentance, the father's forgiveness, the brother's anger. Three lives, three highlights. And from these three highlights we know everything we should know about the three persons who figure in the story. Yet the whole tale is barely over five hundred words.

C. R. Which would bar its acceptance by a modern magazine.

A. Yes. And that may be due to the fact that today we are less interested in simple essentials of emotion than in its shades and gradations and nuances. We are so busy exploiting our half-feelings, our in-between emotions, that the great passion often escapes us. But to return to the Parable. Think what a modern writer would do with it!

C. R. Yes, I know. He would stretch it out to five thousand words to suit the requirements of the magazine editor.

A. He would do more than that. He would make a hundred-thousand-word novel out of it. And, indeed, I believe two or three writers have done so. But that isn't what I want to stress. What interests me are the technical processes by which a short story ceases being a short story and becomes a novel. Once we see this difference, the first principles of the art of the short story will perhaps become clear to us.

C. R. Yes, that brings us back to the subject of our discussion. I am glad that you are examining the novel and the short story together. I must confess that for the life of me I cannot always tell them apart, except for the fact that one is long, the other short.

A. I see you are beginning to realize my difficulties, my friend. We will come back to this question of length presently. For the moment allow me to reiterate some of the points I have already made. Please bear in mind that the short story concerns itself with culmination, with dramatic highlights, concentric moments; the novel with development, the filling in of gaps between those tense highly charged moments. In the novel we approach the high points only by gradations, by slow arduous climbing; hence the highlights are either lost in the extensive emotional panorama or somewhat diminished in effect by the time they are reached.

C. R. What do you mean exactly by emotional panorama?

A. It is very simple. Suppose one were to consider making a modern novel of the Prodigal Son. The author

would probably begin by telling of the Prodigal Son's heredity, of all the early influences of his life, of tendencies in his character, of his repressions and consequent complexes, and all the rest of the rigmarole which led to his leaving home. He would, moreover, describe the father, the stay-at-home son, and would fill in the background with numerous minor characters and their minor emotions. Nor would he forget to describe the house and the objects in it. He would also tell about the Prodigal's life away from home, about his travels and escapades and love affairs. He would go into infinite details of the workings of his mind and of his final repentance. For contrast, he would spend pages and pages in giving pictures of the quiet life at home, where the father and his other son employed their time in looking after their calves, fatted and otherwise, and domestic arrangements.

C. R. Still, the dénouement would remain the same as in the parable?

A. Yes, but don't you see, the effect would be cumulative, not instantaneous. The filling in the gaps between the highlights would leave less to the reader's imagination. If the characters in the beginning had been described accurately, you'd have some idea how they would act in crises. The element of speed, of surprise and of sting would be gone.

C. R. Ah, I see. There would be greater completeness, but not the same finality.

A. That is finely put.

C. R. Can you name any relatively modern short story to which your analogy may be applied? For, after all, you have to satisfy the modern reader, who will not hear of parables.

A. I can name several, but let us limit ourselves to one, "The Necklace," by Maupassant.

C. R. Excellent. It is a very simple tale, with but a single, at most two highlights. It is a short story, pure and simple. I do not see how by any stretch of imagination one could make a novel of it.

A. On the contrary, my friend. There is a world of possibilities in those wasted years of the poor woman's life,

between the moment of her losing the necklace and her discovery ten years later of its being paste. A modern novelist would think nothing of describing ten years of life, anybody's life however tedious that life may be. I could name a dozen such novels off-hand, but being a novelist myself, I shall refrain, lest their authors take it as an offence, which I do not intend at all. Indeed, I cannot but admire their ability to create an atmosphere of prolonged tragedy out of far more scant materials than these.

C. R. You may spare yourself the trouble. But you have said something which must give food for thought. For there are few short stories written by acknowledged short story writers today which will stand the test you have named—the test of highlights. Some of the so-called best tales read rather like bits out of novels, fragments out of such atmospheric novels as you have just mentioned; while the novels themselves are too often elongated short stories.

A. That is true. I am delighted with you, my friend. You can now appreciate my difficulty, why I have refrained from defining the short story. As I have said at the beginning, a new consciousness is developing, and where it will lead us, or for good or for ill, I cannot say.

C. R. What do you mean by a new consciousness?

A. Perhaps, I should have said sub-consciousness. For the writers are still groping, and we may be only on the fringe of a new art or science.

C. R. Art or science? Frankly, I don't understand.

A. Possibly, it all started with the invention of the microscope.

C. R. But that sounds ridiculous! What has the microscope to do with the art of fiction narrative?

A. Little, it would seem at first sight. But, of course, I am using the microscope merely to describe a tendency, to symbolize the analytical or psycho-analytical age in which we are living. Time was when a piece of cheese was but a piece of cheese, fit or unfit for eating, but now we count the worms in it.

C. R. I still fail to see what you are driving at.

A. Simply this. Whereas, like the cheese, we regarded people once as good or bad, we are now turning the micro-

scope on the human consciousness in order to see the chemical or purely mechanical processes which dictate this or that action, or a whole series of actions. The mechanists and the psycho-analysts are the new realists, and these can't see the soul for the mechanisms and the worms. There are no longer noble or ignoble actions, but only actions and reactions dictated by purely material processes. The processes themselves interest some writers to the exclusion of all else; hence, there are no longer any highlights. There can be no dramatic, concentric moments in the lives of machines.

C. R. That sounds depressing. Is there no hope then?

A. Of course, there is. There is never an idea but that there are people in revolt against it. For example, we have been inundated of late with ghost stories. That is one form of revolt against the scientific realists.

C. R. That is, surely, unsatisfactory. We can't live on ghost stories alone.

A. I quite agree. A more satisfactory form of revolt has been what we call scientific mysticism.

C. R. What is that?

A. What I call the scientific mystics are people who, while accepting the facts of the microscope, have attached to these facts quite a mystic significance. They see the fragments of life, to be sure, as under a microscopic glass; yet each fragment assumes the vastness of a world, and is not less significant than the whole world we know. After all, even our planet, vast as it is, is but a tiny fragment in the space in which it revolves.

C. R. Can you name a single writer of fiction who has such a conception of life?

A. Chekhov was one of the first moderns to have this consciousness. Katherine Mansfield also now and then creatively expressed this microscopic conception of life. You will remember, perhaps, a little story of hers called "The Fly." No tale could give you a better idea of "infinitude lurking in smallness." As one critic has aptly said of it: "It uses the sense of universal cruelty to typify the eternal injustice of fate; there is an atmosphere about it of sheer and terrible fatalism; it wrings the heart without the least concession to sentiment."

C. R. Not a bad summing up. I remember the story well. Yet, as fine as it is, might not this tale be considered as but a fragment, a chapter from a novel—"a slice of life," as some would call it? After all, nothing happens. A man begins by thinking of his son, who had been killed six years before in France, and ends by killing a fly he had rescued from the ink-pot. Where is your highlight, your concentric, dramatic moment, which you argued is so essential to the short story?

A. Your question is pertinent. Yet here is the crux of the matter, and how well it illustrates the changing concepts in the art of the short story as in the other arts. The sense of action rests no longer in the external sphere but in the subconsciousness. Hence, the highlight, too, the quintessence of dramatic action, is moved to a deeper stratum of consciousness. It is a less obtrusive, more subtle affair, but when it strikes it strikes instantaneously. The highlight in "The Fly" is the instant in which the reader realizes the intimate connection between the two tragedies. On the wheel of fate the man is no more than the fly, the fly not less than the man. You suddenly say to yourself: "I had not thought of it before!" I do not say that this art is the supreme art, or the only art; but there is inexorableness in it, and pity, eternal things. . . . As I have said, we are, perhaps, as yet on the fringe of things. . . .

C. R. Enough for today, Mr. Cournos. I have an appointment. I am glad I have had this talk with you. I can see it is a very perplexing subject.

A. I am pleased that you realize my difficulties. More another time. Good-by!

JOHN COURNOS.

New Haven, Conn., June, 1924.

II

For the benefit of readers unacquainted with the earlier volumes of this series, I repeat here a brief summary of the principles which have governed our choice of stories. We have set ourselves the task of disengaging the essential human qualities in our contemporary fiction which, when chronicled conscientiously by our literary artists, may fairly be called a criticism of life. We are not at all interested in formulæ, and organized criticism at its best would be nothing more than dead criticism, as all dogmatic interpretation of life is always dead. What has interested us, to the exclusion of other things, is the fresh living current which flows through the best British and Irish work, and the psychological and imaginative reality which writers have conferred upon it.

No substance is of importance in fiction, unless it is organic substance, that is to say, substance in which the pulse of life is beating. Inorganic fiction has been our curse in the past, and bids fair to remain so, unless we exercise much greater artistic discrimination than we display at present.

The present record covers the period from June, 1923, to May, 1924, inclusive. During this period we have sought to select from the stories published in British and American periodicals those stories by British and Irish authors which have rendered life imaginatively in organic substance and artistic form. Substance is something achieved by the artist in every creation, rather than something already present, and accordingly a fact or a group of facts in a story only attain substantial embodiment when the artist's power of compelling imaginative persuasion transforms them into a living truth. The first test of a short story, therefore, in any qualitative analysis is to report upon how vitally compelling the writer makes his selected facts or incidents. This test may be conveniently called the test of substance.

But a second test is necessary if the story is to take rank above other stories. The true artist will seek to shape this living substance into the most beautiful and satisfying form,

by skillful selection and arrangement of his materials, and by the most direct and appealing presentation of it in portrayal and characterization.

We have recorded here the names of a group of stories which possess, we believe, the distinction of uniting genuine substance and artistic form in a closely woven pattern with such sincerity that they are worthy of being reprinted. If all of these stories were republished, they would not occupy more space than six or seven novels of average length. Our selection of them does not imply the critical belief that they are great stories. A year which produced one great story would be an exceptional one. It is simply to be taken as meaning that we have found the equivalent of six or seven volumes worthy of republication among all the stories published during the period under consideration. In compiling this book we have permitted no personal preference or prejudice to consciously influence our judgment. The general and particular results of our study will be found explained and carefully detailed in the supplementary part of the volume.

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN.

P. S. A short story is a story which is short!

Rapallo, Italy,
July 4, 1924.

**THE BEST
BRITISH SHORT STORIES
OF 1924**

MR. FRANKLYN'S ADVENTURE¹

By JAMES MURRAY ALLISON

(From *The London Mercury*)

"I PERSONALLY have been through an experience so odd, so unusual, and so extraordinary that I find it difficult to make my friends believe it."

Half a dozen men were smoking and talking late at night in the cardroom of a great liner. There was a retired Admiral who told wonderful tales of the sea, a poet known to two continents, a Cambridge Don, a "Black and Tan" on leave from Ireland, myself and Mr. Franklyn. Mr. Franklyn had been a listener during the evening, and his contribution came about midnight. He was a little man, with a shiny bald head. He spoke very slowly and very deliberately, and emphasised his points by wagging his forefinger. He told me afterwards that he was second accountant to a firm of grain merchants in Cardiff.

He started his tale with the sentence I have quoted above, and went on: "It happened in 1916—during the war, you know. It was either late in June or early in July—I've forgotten the actual day. It may have been in June, or, as I say, in July: I am not sure. It doesn't matter very much really, but I fix the time there or thereabouts because I had occasion to come to London on business, very delicate and intricate business, the details of which I will not trouble you with tonight.

"I was staying at the Strand Palace Hotel, where, believe me, gentlemen, they do you very handsomely. You get a bedroom, quite nicely furnished. There was a picture, I remember, of Marcus Stone's on the wall of the bedroom. I've forgotten the title of the picture, but I can even now see the composition. There was a rustic seat on the left, and on the seat there was a young lady—quite young, about

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twenty or nineteen, or perhaps twenty-one. She was sitting on the seat—the rustic seat—dressed in some light material—muslin, or something that looked like muslin—reading a letter, obviously a love letter, because on the right of the picture, peeping round a big tree—an elm, I think, or an oak, I've forgotten which—there was a youngish man. He had top boots on—Wellingtons, you know—and he was looking in her direction, probably *at* her. Anyway, it was plain that the letter that she was reading was from him. Well, you get a bedroom and breakfast—an egg, or a bit of fish, or a rasher of bacon, a cup of tea, or coffee—though I may say that I do not believe in drinking coffee for breakfast. I mean I wouldn't have it stopped—coffee drinking, I mean—but I do hold that coffee is a drink that should come after lunch, or after dinner, but never, never at breakfast. However, that is my own private view about it. I would not force it upon other people.

"They bring the breakfast up on a tray—not a wooden tray. It is of metal of some description, probably iron, though I'm inclined to think it was tin. They have painted flowers on them, not at all badly painted flowers; as a matter of fact, quite nicely painted. I should say they were daisies or pansies or even roses, sometimes a combination of all three, though I have seen——

"Anyway, you get the room—the bedroom with the picture—and the breakfast and a bathroom in the same corridor as the bedroom for six shillings. You did then; it may be a little higher now, but in those days it was six shillings. I can vouch for that, because I stayed there for three days, and my bill was eighteen shillings exactly. You may quote me as to that."

At this point the retired Admiral, who had been glaring at Franklyn, said, "And then, sir——"

"Now," said Franklyn, "I'm coming to the real story. A friend of mine from Leeds, who, I don't mind telling you, is the chief letter sorter at one of the Leeds post offices, asked me to lunch at the Victoria Hotel in Northumberland Avenue. It was either the Victoria or the Metropole or the Grand. It was one of the three, I'm not quite sure which, because the experience of the day was so strange that

I cannot now recollect what hotel it was that we actually did have luncheon at on that day. But this I do know, for reasons which I shall presently state, it was in Northumberland Avenue. Call it the Victoria, or if you like the Grand, or even the Metropole, though on the whole I rather think we had better call it the Victoria—but really it doesn't matter very much so far as this story is concerned.

"Well, I got the letter—the letter from my Leeds friend—inviting me to lunch. There was nothing very remarkable about the letter. It ran something like this:

"My dear Franklyn,

"I shall be in London on Tuesday next, and as I hear that you will be in Town on that day, I should like you to have lunch with me at the blank hotel at 1.15.'"

"I was delighted to accept my friend's invitation, and I wrote him to that effect—a postcard I think it was, but no matter. I will not weary you with the details of how I spent the morning; that has nothing to do with this story, but at 12.45 I came into the Strand Palace Hotel for a wash and a brush up. I remember going up to my bedroom and ringing for a maid, who very kindly brought me a jug of hot water, and I remember looking round the room—a sort of final look round, you know—and just as I was leaving, I noticed on the mantelpiece a red pencil. It was either a two-H or a three-H, I am not now certain. But of this I am certain; it was an H—not a B. And I'll tell you why I'm certain. The B pencils are much blacker and very much softer than the H's. The H is a hard pencil—you know, metallic. Accountants use H's; artists use B's. A cousin of mine is an artist, and he uses B's, *always*. But I use H's—not one-H's, but two or even three-H's. The more H's the harder. And another thing, the H's don't smudge like B's do. You can't have ledgers all smudged up you know. So that's why accountants use H's.

"Did I tell you that the pencil was red? That is important. It was red. A kind of scarlet—very red. You must get that firmly fixed in your mind; otherwise you will miss the whole point of the story. The pencil was red. By the way, the pencil wasn't round. It had sides to it—six or eight. I've forgotten the number, but probably six.

Incidentally, I can't understand people who go about using round pencils, especially accountants. I like 'em with sides on 'em, and this pencil had sides. I don't think it was a Koh-i-noor, nor a Venus; it might have been a Hardtmuth, I cannot now recall. It had 'Graphite' on it in gold letters—capital letters. I'm sure of that, because I remember saying to myself, 'Graphite'—it sounded to me like 'Dynamite'—you know, the stuff that explodes—dynamite.

"Anyway, the pencil was on the mantelpiece, and I put it into my top waistcoat pocket, and for this reason. I always make notes, always. You never know, you know; so I personally always make notes. I make notes in notebooks or on old envelopes. I often cut the sides of envelopes and spread them out to make notes on, though I will say this, it is very awkward to make long notes on the insides of envelopes because of the gummed parts. The pencil always slips up along the edge, and sometimes the notes are difficult to read. On this occasion, however, it didn't matter; I didn't make any notes at all; and for this reason—I lost the pencil!

"That is exactly what happened. I lost the pencil. I remember distinctly putting the pencil into my top right-hand waistcoat pocket; I remember it distinctly—there is no question or doubt about that. When I left the Strand Palace Hotel the red pencil, two or three H's, not round, but with sides to it, with 'Graphite' in gold letters, capital letters, stamped upon its end, was in my top right-hand waistcoat pocket. There is, I think, no necessity for me to stress this point, because you will shortly discover from what followed that it must have been there, unless we live in an age of miracles. The theory has been advanced, by the way, that what happened on that day *was* actually a miracle. My friend from Leeds—the letter sorter—is convinced that it was a miracle, but the evidence is such that barring my forgetfulness in the matter of the actual name of the pencil and the number of H's, there can be nothing miraculous about what followed. I should not describe the thing as a coincidence—that would scarcely do. I simply call it odd, unusual, out of the way, if you like, but not miraculous.

"The facts are plain. I put the pencil into my top right-hand waistcoat pocket before leaving the Strand Palace

Hotel to go to lunch with a friend—the letter sorter from Leeds—at the Victoria—call it the Victoria; it is no use going into all that again—Hotel in Northumberland Avenue. It was just about one. The clock at the Law Courts, near the church that Claude Duval hid at after his affair with Nell Gwynne at Simpson's, was under repair, so I can't guarantee the exact time; but it was one, or about one—not very much later, because I turned up at the hotel at about five past one, and waited for my friend in the vestibule. I didn't know then that I'd lost the pencil—I found out later."

Franklyn was now very solemnly wagging a forefinger and tapping the edge of the table to emphasise his points.

"Presently, at quarter past one, in came my friend from Leeds. We went into the dining-room, and sat down at a small table. Now I don't mind saying that I'm very fond of radishes, and I may say that I made a fairly handsome onslaught on a selection of that dish that the waiter—a dark looking fellow, probably an Italian, although you never know, he might have been French, or Spanish—placed before us. I always eat them with mustard: I am aware that many people prefer pepper and salt, but I like mustard—with radishes I mean. And I'll tell you another thing that I like with mustard—mutton.

"Well, my friend, who, by the way, is a very witty man, didn't take any of the sardines, shredded tomatoes, potato salad, pickled cabbage, or indeed any of the hors d'œuvres. He had ordered fish, I think turbot, but I am not sure; it might have been salmon, but I don't think it was. But whatever it was, it became evident from his manner that he was becoming a little impatient.

"He leant across the table and said to me, 'Fairbairn'—that's my Christian name—'Fairbairn,' he said—he was obviously hungry—'Fairbairn,' he said, '*When they say "treacle" I shall say "lick."*'

"I burst out laughing, burst out laughing—I remember the tears rolling down my cheeks. Then I said, 'That's good, very good,' and I remember saying distinctly, 'I must make a note of that.' That is what I said. I said I would make a note of it. I felt for my pencil—the pencil

that I've already described to you, the red pencil, the pencil that should have been in my top right-hand waistcoat pocket. It was gone! Believe me, or believe me not, gentleman, the pencil was not there. It had disappeared! It was gone—lost! I'd lost the pencil! There can be no doubt about the pencil being in my pocket when I left the Strand Palace Hotel. That I shall shortly prove. There is no question about that. The pencil was in my pocket at one o'clock or thereabouts, but at one-twenty the pencil was not in my pocket. There is no room for discussion on that. The pencil was, shall I say?—'*non est*.'

"Now here comes the strange part of my story. We chatted over lunch. I've forgotten what we talked about. In the circumstances it is not to be wondered at. I must confess that the loss of the pencil had upset me, though I hope that my friend didn't notice it. But it had. I admit it was a trifling matter, but it was odd. I repeat again that there is no confusion about the pencil being in my pocket—none whatever—it certainly was odd. The whole thing is clear *now*, as you will admit that presently, but then it was not so; quite the contrary. Then it was difficult, impossible, to explain. However, we got through lunch somehow, and I hope that there was not in my manner any hint of the loss I had sustained. I think I may say that I kept my end up. It was not till afterwards that I told my friend from Leeds about the loss of the pencil. I wrote to him the next day. I shall never forget his answer. It was a long letter. My friend is a fancier of Pouter Pigeons. As a matter of fact, his Blue Metal Rocky 'Gertrude' took the first prize three years running at the Leeds Poultry Show, though why people show pigeons among fowls—. Well, he wrote me at some length about Pouters, and referred to my letter to him—the one I sent him about the loss and recovery of the pencil—and I shall never forget what he said about it. He said, 'My dear Fairbairn, the recovery of the pencil is little short of a miracle.' That is what he said. I've got the letter at home in Cardiff, and any time you like, you can come and see it. Read it—read it for yourselves. I live about a mile and a half from the Cardiff Town Hall, one of the handsomest buildings in the West of England. You get

the tram at the corner of High Street, where the tobacconist's shop is. You get the tram—you can't make a mistake; there's a wooden Indian outside the shop—you get the tram there, and in about twenty minutes you are at 'The Eagle's Nest.' That's the name of my house, 'The Eagle's Nest.' I've got the letter in a filing cabinet just outside the living-room in the hall. It is stained oak—the cabinet, I mean. And that is what he says in the letter. 'My dear Fairbairn'—my Christian name—he says, 'The recovery of the pencil is little short of a miracle.' That is what he said."

By this time the audience had been reduced to pulp. It was the poet who helped us out. He said politely, "How did you eventually discover the missing pencil?"

"That," said Mr. Franklyn, "is the *whole* point of my story. I felt my friend from Leeds, whose letter in response to mine I still possess, as I've told you, and any time you may—but I'll not go over that again—I left him at the end of Northumberland Avenue; not the end near the National Liberal Club; the other end, where that fellow is—now what is his name? Everybody knows it. God bless my soul, I'll forget my own name one of these days! What is that fellow's name?"

"Do you mean Phillips, the nautical instrument maker?" said the Admiral.

"No, no," said Franklyn. "He's much more important. It's—it's—"

"I know," said the poet, "it's Jameson's, the book shop."

"Don't be a damn' fool," said Franklyn. "The man I mean is in Trafalgar Square—actually in the Square. Everybody knows him."

"I know," said I. "Hepple, the chemist."

Franklyn got quite angry. "No, not Hepple. He doesn't keep a shop, the man I mean. He's up on a pedestal, a column. Now what is his name?"

Said the Admiral, faintly, "You don't refer to Nelson?"

"Yes," said Franklyn. "That's the chap! That's the end of Northumberland Avenue, where he is, that I parted from my friend from Leeds. The nature of our parting is not important. I left him on the corner and walked back to the Strand Palace Hotel. I walked upon the left hand side

of the Strand, past the Post Office, past Horne Brothers' shop, past the A.B.C., past Lyons's, past Dunn, the hatter, where the medical statues are, though I cannot see why *The Daily Express* made such a fuss about them, and past the Adelphi Theatre. There was a play on. I cannot remember now what it was, but it is of no importance. Now, here's the point.

"When I got to Romano's—a restaurant facing the Cecil Hotel—I happened to glance quite casually into the gutter, and I noticed a gleam of red—in the gutter. I paused. I, as a matter of fact, stopped. I looked; I stooped down, and what do you think, gentlemen, I discovered lying in the gutter outside Romano's Restaurant? My pencil! My red pencil—the very pencil that I have been telling you about! There it was; lying in the gutter outside Romano's Restaurant—in the gutter. My pencil; there it was. It must have slipped from my pocket when passing an hour or two previously. As I say, it must have slipped from my pocket.

"I have often thought about it, about the whole thing. I can find no other explanation. The pencil, my red pencil, that I took from the mantelpiece in my bedroom at the Strand Palace Hotel just before I left to take lunch with my friend from Leeds, and with which, you will remember, I meant to take notes; the H pencil (two or three H's), with six or eight sides to it, and stamped with the word 'Graphite' in gold letters. (You will remember that it reminded me of the word 'dynamite'—an explosive). The pencil had obviously fallen from my pocket and rolled out into the gutter—rolled into the gutter, from my pocket, when I was walking from the Strand Palace Hotel to take lunch with my friend. I shall never forget it.

"There is only one explanation: the pencil must have fallen from my pocket. Just that. I must have dropped it. There cannot be any other explanation."

There was a long silence. The Admiral was looking at Mr. Franklyn with a very peculiar expression upon his face. He was, I think, making up his mind to say something. What it was I do not know, because Franklyn said with an air of finality, "Well, gentlemen, that's my story. I tell

you the facts, I add nothing. I subtract nothing. I have elaborated no incident of that day's adventure. I've told you the thing exactly as it happened to me. What do you think of it?"

Nobody told him.

MRS. LOVELACE¹

By MARTIN ARMSTRONG

(From *The London Mercury*)

WHEN the master of the house dies, the blinds are drawn, and the house is closed in upon itself, its life governed by the unforgettable presence in the room upstairs. But after the dead man has been carried downstairs and borne to his grave, the house opens its eyes again upon the world and little by little renews its ordered rhythm. Such a thing had befallen me. I had crouched, dumb and blind, like a darkened house before the one absorbing fact of my disaster. And when at last I began to look outwards again I felt that new scenes and bodily exercise were necessary to enable me to regain possession of myself. Then, as I groped rather faint-heartedly for a plan, I remembered that six-days walk I had taken ten years ago—fifty years ago it seemed now—through the valleys and among the hills of that remote countryside where autumn was slowly and gorgeously burning itself out. That autumnal countryside had remained in my memory as a sanctuary to which my mind could return again and again for refreshment; and as in the course of time the actual details had faded, the sensation of the place had become intensified, till now it returned to me more as a rich melody than as an assembly of tangible facts. Then, as my mind was submerged once more in that mellow atmosphere—that old, inevitable, never-ending tune—it penetrated to the heart of the thing, the person who had been for me the meaning, the reality, of which all those enchanting things were only the symbols, and like the return of swallows in the spring, detail after detail came back into my memory, building up again the whole experience.

¹ Copyright, 1924, by Martin Armstrong.

It was during the last days of my holiday that I had met Mrs. Lovelace. In a morning sharp with dew and bright with sunshine, I had climbed to a great undulating heath, a rolling sea of copper-coloured bracken that spread like a double tide to either margin of the moorland road and foamed about the feet of sombre firs which dotted the heath with rare islands. From there at noon the road dropped towards the valley again; trees crowded up to its edges and stood there, many-shaped and many-coloured, in hanging cascades of crimson and orange, sudden puffs of scarlet fire, or upward leaping fountains of blond foam. At the bottom of the valley the road skirted a small tree-girdled lake, round and deep like a great inverted dome, in whose concavity the burning colours of the trees were blurred and melted in the dark transparency of the water. And long after the lake had passed behind me, I had come upon that lonely inn by the roadside, and knew from my map that I was now eight miles from the village where I had planned to pass the night. Then, as I continued on my way, I began to regret my swift passage, and to think that I should do better to stay the night at the inn I had just passed and so linger a little among those surroundings. Just as I had resolved to do so, I came upon her round a bend of the road. At first the freedom and alertness of her step made me think she was a girl, and even when we came face to face her bright complexion and clear eyes would have confirmed the belief had it not been for her white hair and something calm and mature in her expression which was beautiful beyond the beauty of youth. As an excuse to speak to her, I stopped and asked her about the inn, and when she told me that she lived there it was one reason the more that I should break my journey there.

And a delightful inn it was—a little tumbledown place, yet everything about it was charming: the landlord with his humorous, weather-beaten face; the landlady shy, dark-haired, and quietly attentive to one's well-being; and their child Mary, a lovely little girl of eight, half flower, half confiding little animal. But the most noticeable thing about them was their love for Mrs. Lovelace. It was she, one felt, who was the mainspring of the whole affair. It was

somehow because of her that the landlord was so friendly and so comical, the landlady so anxious that you should be happy, and the child such a lovable little creature. Yes, evidently Mrs. Lovelace had enchanted the place. When she came into the room, one felt an access of well-being; when she left it, it was as though someone had blown out a light. And she was always entering and leaving the room, busy, it seemed, about lending a hand with the housework. Sometimes she would flit in and up to a cupboard carrying plates and glasses, or pass—a sudden apparition—from one door to another, leading a dog; or her light footstep would cross the ceiling, her clear voice call from the garden at the back of the house. And whenever one saw her or heard her, one felt a glow of satisfaction. There was no resisting, and I too was drawn into the scheme—became yet another satellite revolving round that central radiance, and I lingered there for days, unwilling to exile myself from such a delicious state of things. One laughed and talked and enjoyed one's food, or told fairy-stories to the little girl—all because of Mrs. Lovelace: and none of the stories told was more enchantingly impossible than the actual life that we led there.

On the day of my departure an old parson turned up for lunch; he had walked over from his vicarage four miles away. He was received as an old friend, it was almost as if they were expecting him, and we all sat down together to a jovial lunch. My road to the station lay through his village and when I set off on my eight miles walk he went with me.

"Well," he said, after we had finished our goodbyes and were getting into our stride, "I hope you have fallen in love with Mrs. Lovelace?"

"Certainly I have," I replied.

"That's right," he said. "Everybody does."

"I can hardly imagine the place existing without her," I went on. "The inn, the landlord, his wife, and that delightful little child, the whole delicious life of the place seem to me . . . well, simply reflections, manifestations of Mrs. Lovelace."

"And yet," said the parson, "there was a time—nearly

half a century ago, it is true—before she came. I knew her as a child of six, and twelve years later I remember her coming to the inn, a mere girl still, with her husband. She had bolted with him, God bless her. Her people had refused their consent: he had no money—she hadn't much: two hundred a year, I believe—and he was considered to be beneath her in station. So he was. But he was as fine a young fellow as you could wish to meet. In the Mercantile Marine. He had signed on with a ship in the China trade which was off in a few weeks' time on a five years' voyage, and her people insisted—hoping, of course, that the affair would blow over altogether—that they should at least wait till he returned. I didn't sympathise with their views. The two young people were head over ears in love, and, as I said, he was a first-rate chap, one in ten thousand. So I was delighted, despite my cloth, when I had heard one afternoon that she had packed up and bolted with him. They came to the inn for their honeymoon, and when the time came for him to go she stayed on there during the five years of his absence, cheerfully awaiting his return. And at last he was back again—back for a couple of months. You met them together all over the country doing day long rambles together. Their perfect happiness was visible to all. Everyone knew them and looked out for them, deriving a sort of reflected happiness from the sight of them. Then he went away again, but this time he never came back. It was fever he died of, I believe, somewhere in the China Seas. I was afraid it would be the end of her; but I was wrong, absurdly wrong, for after the first shock she rallied and soon recovered herself completely. It seemed—how can I express it?—as if their happiness in one another had not been destroyed by his death, but rather that it remained with her, not as a mere memory, a consolation to be found only by introspective brooding, but as a living reality. You remember the words of Christ: "I am the water of life: he that drinketh of Me shall never thirst." So it is with Mrs. Lovelace: she tasted once of perfect happiness and, as you see, she still has enough not only for herself but also for the whole countryside. I turn up, as I turned up today, once a month, to renew my supply."

We parted, the old parson and I, when we reached his village.

"Goodbye, goodbye," he said. "And don't forget to go back to the inn when your supply runs short." He stood with one hand on his gate, and, waving the other to me, vanished out of my life. . . .

II

Like a diver curving up from his cool rush through dim water into a dazzle of sunlight, I came up out of my dip into the past and awoke to the desolation of my unhappy present. The old boy's words were still in my mind. Certainly now, if ever, my supply had run short. What could be better, then, than to go back to the inn and Mrs. Lovelace? I looked out trains and packed my knapsack.

When having reached my destination, I left the slow little train to draw its plume of smoke among the harvests of the valley and made my way uphill into the heart of the country, I felt that I had stepped straight back into that life into which I had dipped for a few days ten years ago. Yet it was not exactly the same, because everything about me exhaled that poignant and baffling intensity, that more-than-reality, with which scenes revisited after a long interval sometimes assail the senses. The still fires and standing fountains of autumn filled the country, as before, with a transforming splendour: unmoving, everlasting, it would have seemed under the still autumn sunshine, if here and there a red leaf floating vertically to the ground had not portended the beginning of change. The days were cloudless as ten years ago, and when I reached the small, dark lake, it was incredibly, piercingly the same. I could almost have believed that the colours of those blurred and mingled reflections had never faded from its round deep mirror but had smouldered on for ten years as they had smouldered, half-forgotten but unextinguished, in my mind. And all the time I kept expecting to meet Mrs. Lovelace: at every turn in the road, at every opening in the trees, I kept wondering that she did not appear. I remembered the old parson's story. "You met them," he had said, "all over

the country, doing long rambles together." And that country lived in my memory so entirely as part of the mind of Mrs. Lovelace, that it seemed irrational that the old scenes should reappear and yet she be absent.

When I reached the inn the sun had already gone down, but it was hardly dusk enough to draw the blinds, so that to find the inn with its blinds drawn and its windows dark came to me as a shock. But as I rounded the house I saw an upstairs window—hers, I was sure—brightly illuminated, with the blind still undrawn, and at once I felt reassured; it was so typical of her and her relation to the inn. Yet it was strange and not so typical, I reflected, that the light should all be concentrated into one room and the rest of the place should be dark. And when I entered it was stranger still, for there was dimness and silence. It was as though someone had blown out a candle. At the sound of my feet the landlady appeared. Her face chilled me to the bone. It was not that she received me coldly: though she did not at first recognise me—and how should she, so changed as I was?—her greeting had the same quiet kindness. But I missed something in her face, and again the phrase came to me "as though someone had blown out a candle." In a voice I could hardly control, I asked after Mrs. Lovelace.

"She's gone," she replied.

"Gone?" I said. "Left you for good?" She nodded.

"Surely you did not quarrel?"

"How could we quarrel?" she answered with a quivering smile. She said no more, and I dared not question her further.

"And the child?" I asked. At that a light flickered for a moment in her eyes.

"Mary was married yesterday," she answered. The door opened, and the landlord came in and we sat, all three, in the twilight, talking over the fire. In him too I felt that withdrawal of the former flame which I had felt from the moment of my arrival both in the landlady and in the whole atmosphere of the inn. His old humour was numbed and muted, a ghost of its former joviality. Again and again the name of Mrs. Lovelace rose to my lips, and always something in myself, something in them, deprived me of courage

to speak of her. Even when the landlady went upstairs to prepare my room, the landlord and I talked only of other things.

When she returned, I went up to wash and take off my dusty boots.

"The same room as last time," she told me with a faint smile. "The second on the left."

I climbed the stairs. A floor-board at the stairhead wheezed beneath my feet—a sharp, familiar reminder of my former visit, but in the semi-darkness of the passage my memory failed me for a moment, and when at last I opened the door which I thought was mine, a surprising vision confronted me, for the room was brightly illuminated and full of a rich scent. Candles shone on the mantelpiece and in the mirror behind them their reflections answered them with a milder and more misty glow. There were more candles on the table, and as my eyes grew accustomed to the soft brightness, I saw in a corner of the room an arbour of autumnal boughs, scarlet, orange, and crimson, built like a canopy above the bed. Then with a shock I saw beneath the carefully-spread white counterpane the mould of a human body. My eyes ran up to the pillow, but on the pillow I could see nothing but a cluster of large white lilies. There was a soft footfall behind me. It was the landlady with a candle in her hand. She closed the door and came up to me. "Come and look," she whispered, and with her I approached the bed on tiptoe and found between the lilies what I had expected to find—the face of Mrs. Lovelace. The pallor of death had not diminished its beauty, indeed it had added a touch of frail youthfulness which was not there before. The thick hair drawn back from her temples shone in the yellow candlelight not white but the fairest flaxen. It was as though she had become a girl again. And so happy, so serene was her expression that it was impossible, as we stood looking at her, to feel otherwise than happy and serene.

"These lilies," said the landlady, "are what Mary carried at her wedding." She attended to the candles and smoothed the edge of the pillow as though for a sleeper, and we went out together.

"Come down into the kitchen," she said, "and I'll tell you all that happened."

"Two years ago," she began, when I was seated between her and her husband before the fire, "when Mary was eighteen, she and a young fellow near here began courting. He was such a good boy in every way that we were glad, in spite of the fact that he was so poor that, even with what we could give Mary, there was no hope that they would be able to wed for years. Two years went by and they were fonder than ever of each other, but he was as far as ever, seemingly, from earning anywhere near enough to keep a wife. Then, one day not long ago, he came along to say that he was going to Australia. A cousin of his father had offered him a place there and it seemed the only chance of getting a paying job.

"Mary did her best to take it reasonable-like, but you could see how hard it hit her. At the end of a week the poor child was as pinched and pale as if she had been at death's door. It was then that our dear Mrs. Lovelace stepped in. She had only waited, seemingly, to make sure of them, and now she simply said that Mary's boy was not to go to Australia but was to stay at home and get married at once, because she was going to give them her own money. 'You know my story,' she said: 'well, the best part of that is going to happen over again.' That was a month ago. It was arranged that the two should be wedded yesterday. But a fortnight ago Mrs. Lovelace was taken bad. We never dreamt it was serious till she got worse and we sent for the doctor. She knew she was dying, but the idea of that didn't trouble her at all, and she remained her old self almost to the end. 'Don't worry,' she said. 'I shan't die till after they're married,' and she wouldn't let us change the arrangements.

"Yesterday—the day of the wedding, that is—I sat with her while they all went to the church, and when it was over my man came up and gave us an account of it, and she listened to it all, as pleased and interested as could be. Then in the evening the two young ones came and sat with her. She knew them, although she was almost past speaking by that time, but when they said good-night to her

she whispered something to Mary. 'It's for you now, Mary,' she said, 'to keep the inn going.' Now what could she mean by that, do you think? Nothing, most likely, for I reckon her poor mind was wandering. Soon after the young ones left her she fell asleep and slept on without a break till, just after midnight, as I was sitting by her bed, I heard a little catch in her breath. I turned, but her breathing had begun again, only more softly now. Then twenty minutes later, there was another little catch and after that the breathing did not re-commence."

The dusk had deepened during the landlady's story and when she finished we sat in darkness. Then there came a sound of wheels on the road. "It's Mary," said the landlady, and she rose eagerly and lighted the lamp: but it was the change in their faces that amazed me more than the growing light of the lamp, for all that I had missed there till then flowed visibly back like the lighting of many candles. There was a step, a click of the latch, and Mary stood in the doorway like an apparition, with the gold of her hair shining in the lamplight. And suddenly, not because of any bodily resemblance, but in some subtle, inexplicable, spiritual way, I seemed to be again in the magical presence of Mrs. Lovelace.

BILL GRIMES HIS SOUL¹

By ROLF BENNETT

(From *The English Review*)

"**B**ILL GRIMES could have wrote a book on prison life in almost every country," said the seafaring man as, with his little finger, he pressed down the tobacco in his pipe. "And he was a proper hard case, I tell you. Salted, he was, and no mistake. There wasn't a port from London to Callao by way of East that he didn't know.

"Now one day Bill Grimes got killed. He was walking along the deck when a block fell from the main-t'-gallant yard and flattened him out. It finished Bill all right, and when they picked him up he was a bloody corpse. He hadn't been hanged, shot, garrotted, knifed or guillotined, but just killed by a falling block. Think of that! A man like Bill Grimes dying what you might almost call a peaceful death. And after the life he'd led. Well. . . .

"So the mate fetched out the log-book and found the date and wrote under it, 'William Grimes, A.B., accidentally killed. Lat. 53. Long. 80.' And that's all there was to that. They sewed Bill up in a canvas bag and put a couple of lumps of pig-iron at his feet so's he shouldn't rise before his time, and then they read some prayers over him—they read 'em quick because there looked to be a squall coming up from the sou'west and the old man was in a hurry to shorten sail. So they give him a shove, and 'plop!' overboard goes Bill. Fathoms deep he went, down among the slime and the fishes.

"Now, although Bill was dead and the mate had wrote it in the log all proper and correct, Bill didn't know he was dead. So when he opened his eyes down there under the

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Courtesy of the publisher, Mr. Geoffrey Bles.

green sea, he still thought he was Bill Grimes. Which, of course, he wasn't, being only the soul of Bill Grimes, y'understand. But he'd never had no religious education, or, if he had, he'd forgotten it. Otherwise, I suppose, he'd have knowed he was only a soul and behaved according.

"Well, Bill was a bit puzzled at first, as was only natural. He'd been in some mighty queer places in his time, had Bill, but never in one like this before. There was no sun or wind or clouds, but only a pale green light, something like moonlight; and there was all sorts of fishes, big and little, sailing around in it and staring at Bill in a way that made him feel uncomfortable.

" 'This is a blamed funny country,' says Bill—for, as I've told you, he didn't know he was dead—'wonder how in hell I got here?'

"Well, while he was casting around trying to make out his bearings, just as you or I might do, he suddenly catches sight of a man sitting on a keg. He was the queerest looking man that Bill, alive or dead, had ever seen; for he wore a bandana handkerchief round his head, and a black patch over one eye, and big seaboots that came up to his thighs, and a pair of wide, loose breeches. And he had a sash round his middle with two pistols stuck in it and a rusty cutlass.

" 'Hello, you!' says he, cocking his one eye at Bill.

" 'Hello yourself,' says Bill.

" 'Where do you come from?' asks Black-patch.

" 'The brig *Nancy Bell*,' answers Bill. 'Though how the devil I got here, or where I am, I don't know.'

" 'Oh,' says the other, 'you're down among the Dead Men, that's where you are.'

" 'But I ain't dead,' says Bill.

"At that Black-patch starts to laugh. A holler, mocking laugh that would have made Bill's flesh creep if he hadn't been a spirit without any flesh.

" 'If you're not dead now you never will be,' says he. 'We're all dead down here; every mother's son of us.'

" 'Dead!' cries Bill.

" 'Aye, dead, mate, dead.'

"Well, that brought Bill up with a round turn, as the

saying is. It wasn't what he'd expected, not by long odds, and it was enough to upset any man. Try it yourself. How would you feel if you, thinking yourself to be alive, was told you were dead? Well, there you are.

"'Why, then, I'll never draw no more pay, nor ever see the land again,' says Bill, more to himself like.

"'Never no more, mate, never no more,' sings out Black-patch. 'That's all astarn of ye now. You're down among the Dead Men, mate, so cut it adrift, cut it adrift,' and he laughs that holler, dead laugh that was worse than a groan.

"'Come, come, mate,' says he, seeing Bill's mournful look, 'cheer up, for you've fallen among mighty good company. There's Sir Henry Morgan and Captain Kidd and Admiral Teach—aye, and hundreds more and worse. This way, mate, and step lively now.'

"So Bill, not knowing what else to do, follows the man with the black patch over his eye, till they reaches a sort of cave.

"'What's your name, mate?' says Black-patch all of a sudden.

"'William Grimes,' says Bill.

"'Rating?'

"'A.B.,' says Bill.

"'Right, now we'll go in,' says Black-patch. 'But,' says he, shaking a skeleton finger at Bill, 'take heed, mate, and clew up your jaw tackle. Don't speak till you're spoken to—not yet.'

"So they went inside, and Bill was surprised to see how big the cave was. In fact, it was that big he couldn't see the end of it, nor yet the sides. And everywhere he looked there were men throwing dice and playing cards and tossing coins and gaming in all the ways that were ever invented. Most of them were smoking, all were drinking, and Bill knew from the smell it was rum hot.

"Well, they were a queer crowd, for some had handkerchiefs round their heads and big seaboots on their legs like the man with the black patch; and some had canvas petticoats and some had rusty breast-plates; some had their hair done in tarry pigtails, some had it long and matted, and some had it short. And there were one-eyed men and one-

legged men and one-armed men. There were men of all colours; white, yeller, black and brown, and they sat on kegs or lay on the ground, as the fancy took them.

"Sound the bell," says someone all of a sudden.

"Black-patch went up to a big ship's bell. It was hung above the foc's'le of what looked to be the wreck of a very ancient ship, all covered with barnacles and seaweed. He strikes it three times with a hammer, and at the sound everyone stops gaming and drinking. Not a man moved.

"Before the sound of the bell had stopped, the door of the foc's'le opened and out come the strangest looking figger of a man that Bill had ever seen. He was ten feet high and he had a hooked nose and long, yeller teeth and eyes like little balls of fire, and a horrid grin that made Bill shiver. He climbs on to the foc's'le head, does this queer-looking figger of a man, and sits him down on a big keg. And after him comes a funny little joker with horn spectacles and a brown wig that kept canting to one side of his head. Then he picks up the hammer, does this rum little joker, and strikes the bell with it once.

"'Silence!' he shouts, although, mind you, no one was saying a word. 'Silence for His Grim and Terrible Majesty, Davy Jones!'

"'Who is the new member?' asks Davy Jones in a voice that sounded like he was speaking through a megaphone a mile long.

"Then Black-patch pulls his forelock and does a sort of bow and scrape, and points to Bill.

"'Name?' says Davy Jones, turning his eyes on Bill so that Bill felt as if he was shrivelling up.

"'William Grimes, A.B., your honour,' says Bill.

"'Majesty—you should say Majesty!' shouts the funny little joker to Bill.

"'Fetch the Log, volume four thousand and eighty-six,' says Davy Jones.

"Then two men came along with the biggest book Bill had ever seen, and the funny little joker started to turn over the pages.

"'G—G—G—,' he mutters, swishing over the leaves. 'Grant, Graham—mum—mum—mum—Grimes—ah, here

we are—Grimes, William, A.B. Born Anno Domini one thousand eight hundred and eighty. That you?' he says, looking over the rims of his glasses at Bill.

"'Yes, sir,' answers Bill.

"'What's his record?' says Davy Jones.

"And then the funny little joker starts to read all the crimes and sins that Bill had ever committed, and it took some time to get through, I give you my word. When he stopped to turn over a page, Bill noticed that everyone was looking at him in a pleased and friendly manner. He began to feel quite happy and longed for the moment when he could join the others with a glass of rum hot, a pipe, and a dice-box.

"'Fairly creditable record so far,' says Davy Jones, looking at Bill, 'but nothing to boast about, so don't get stuck up, William Grimes.'

"Then the funny little joker goes on reading:

"'Age thirty-two, guilty of mutiny and murder. Age thirty-eight——"

"He stopped dead all of a sudden, and a cold fear began to creep over Bill. Then, very slow and solemn, the little joker starts reading again:

"'Age thirty-eight, jumped overboard during heavy weather and saved a girl's life.'

"There was a horrible silence and Bill saw that everybody's face had changed, and instead of looking at him friendly like, everyone was scowling at him. And he sort of knew then that there'd be no rum hot, no pipe, and no dice-box for him.

"'Is that true, William Grimes?' asked Davy Jones in an awful voice. And Bill tried to lie, but the words stuck in his throat.

"'You're a vile impostor, William Grimes!' roared Davy Jones in a voice like a peal of thunder. 'Get you gone, you lubber, this is no place for the likes of you!'

"And then Bill felt a sort of jerk like and shut his eyes, not knowing what terrible things was going to happen to him. But at last he opened them again, and what do you think he saw?

"He saw a wonderful city all built of white marble. Yes,

pure white marble; and the roofs were made of solid gold, and so were the streets. And everywhere there was beautiful angels in white dresses, flapping their wings and preening their feathers, or flying around as the fancy took them. There was music and singing the likes of which they have in churches.

"Now while he stood there blinking and wondering where he was and what had happened to him, an extra beautiful angel comes up and hands him a golden harp and a golden crown like what he'd often seen in pictures in Sailors' Homes. And then Bill knew where he was.

" 'William,' says the angel, 'welcome to Paradise.'

"And then Bill saw that this angel was the very little girl he'd jumped overboard to save. And he felt proper mad.

" 'Take your crown and harp!' says he, flinging them as far away as he could, 'I've no use for 'em. If it hadn't been for you,' he says, turning to the angel, 'I'd be with Davy Jones's boys, dicing and drinking rum hot!'

"Well, Bill had no sooner said them words than a great voice said, 'If Paradise ain't good enough for you, Bill Grimes, you can go to Hell!'

"And Bill went. Down he went to a place where there ain't no golden harps nor angels; no, nor dicing nor rum hot neither.

"And that," observed the seafaring man as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, "just shows you."

DEOSIL¹

By MARY BUTTS

(From *The Transatlantic Review*)

EVERY day he woke to the desire to take the world by the throat, and choke it. He had no illusion that the world wanted to be saved; still less that it was ready to be saved by him. Ready!—it was punching at him with agonising blows, to be rid of him, once and for all. He woke up. Even that was not true now. It had been true once, but now the world was getting over any slight alarm he might have caused it. It was leaving him alone, to realise the wounds it had given him. Sometimes it was even tolerant and trying to patch him up.

Oh, God!

He was in the middle of London, in a dull hotel bedroom, stale with travelling from the Shap moors, where two years before he had gone away to think. He had called it thinking, but he had gone there to lick his wounds and dream. He was just intelligent enough to notice that he had not thought, and that what he remembered was certain moments of action. Certainly he did not understand that what he wanted was magic.

He lay, and remembered something about himself: that he was called Dick Tressider, that he was a mystic, and that among the people he met, the word meant a snub, a cliché, an insult, or, very occasionally, a distinction: that he knew a great many people who almost realised his plan, and yet did not: that he was a gentleman. He had not thought of that for a long time. London had reminded him. He damned the place and ordered his bath. He shaved, and put on his good, worn, country-clothes, his heavy boots, his raincoat and leather gloves, all without pride in his strength, or tonic from his unconventionality.

¹ Copyright, 1924, by Mary Butts.

He ate a country breakfast, and looked up his appointments. He felt that he was held from behind by the short hair on his skull, and cursed the city; but what he needed was magic.

It is doubtful if he understood the idea of progress, but whether he did or not, he disliked it. It may be certain, but it is obviously slow. He had his immediate reasons too. He had tried every association which tries to speed man's progress; labour and revolution, agriculture and religion. In each, it was the soundest point in his perception, he had seen one thing and the same thing, which was essential and, at the same time, did not come off. Meanwhile, labour and revolution, agriculture and religion were entirely sick of him. He knew, if any man living knew he knew, that sometimes things were improved, or rather that they were changed, and that in individual action there were moments of a peculiar quality that expressed the state in which he knew the whole earth could live all the time, and settle the hash of time, progress and morality once and for ever. What he wanted to happen was for some man to say a word of power which should evoke this state, everywhere, not by any process, but in the twinkling of an eye. This is magic. Lovers did it, especially his lovers, and saints, when he and one or two men he knew were being saints, with a woman or so about to encourage them, at night, in a smoky room. There were moments too, under the hills, breaking-in horses when it came, the moment of pure being, the coördination of power.

But the universal word did not come off. He was over forty now, and he was losing his nerve. He was beginning to spit and sneer and, since he could not find his word, he was beginning to grin, and hope for the world to ruin itself; and rub his hands, and tell his friends in their moments of pleasure that they were damned, not exactly because they had not listened to him, but for something rather like it. And, as very often they had listened to him, in reason, they were hurt.

Because he had not mastered the earth, he was beginning to hate it. Hate takes the grace out of a spiritual man, even his grace of body. As he left the hotel, and walked

west through the park, and saw the trees coming he drew in one of his animal breaths that showed the canines under his moustache, bright like a dog. *Grim like a dog, and run about the city*; but then he understood that this was one of his empty days, which might be filled with anything or nothing.

"I must fill it," he said, and he meant that on this day, he must have a revelation and a blessing; which is a difficult thing to get to order. He went on to the grass, in among the trees, which are a proper setting for almost every kind of beauty. Their green displayed his tan and harmonised his dress. Their trunks drew attention to his height, the grass gave distinction to his walk. It was early, and there were no pretty women about to make his eyes turn this way and that, greedily, with vanity, with appeal for pity, but too scornfully for success. The trees went on growing. He looked at them and remembered Daphne, and that she had said once: "Stop fussing, Dick. Why can't you let things alone for a bit? Think of trees." "Silly fool of a girl. Wanted me to make love to her, I suppose." He had said that at the time, and he still said it, but he added Daphne to the list of people he was to see that day. Like men of his kind, at cross-purposes with their purpose, there could be nothing fortuitous that happened to him. Everything was a leading, a signature of the reality whose martyr he was, for he could never allow that he had made a fool of himself, and only occasionally that reality had made a fool of him. So he pinned the universe down to a revelation from Daphne, and took a bus to Holborn to get on with the business of the day.

It is much easier for a man to lose his self-consciousness in Holborn than in the female world of South Kensington. He went first to see a friend who was teaching a kind of Christian anarchism made dramatic by the use of Catholic ritual. He was a good man, patient with Dick, who trusted him. It was one of the things that made Dick uneasy that the works of sanctity and illumination are now distributed through offices, and he saw himself a terror to such places. Eden was out. The typist was a very childish one, with short hair and a chintz over-all, and she did not suggest the

Sophia, the Redeemed Virgin, Dick was looking for. He shifted his expectation and saw her as the unredeemed and improbable virgin which is the same thing as the soul of the world, and prepared to treat her for the part. He was hungry by now.

"I'm Dick Tressider," he said, "and I'll wait for Mr. Eden." He dropped his stick, picked it up, lit a cigarette, and walked once or twice up and down the room.

"D'you know about me?"

"I can't say that I do," she said. "So many gentlemen come here for Mr. Eden."

"D'you know Mr. Eden well? Are you conscious of what he is doing here? I mean that it's an expression of what is happening everywhere, of what is bound to happen everywhere, man's consciousness becoming part of the cosmic consciousness?"

"Mr. Eden never says anything about it."

"D'you know this whole damned earth is going to smash any moment?"

"Mr. Eden says that if there are any more wars we shall starve. He is trying to stop it."

He grinned, and showed his wolf's teeth.

"I tell you. It'll make precious little difference what he does. You look as if you might understand. Come out and have some lunch."

She got up obediently. She remembered that she had heard of Dick, that he had been a soldier of some family and some service. Also he was a tall figure of a man, not like the pale, ecstatic townsmen who came there.

He took her to a restaurant and ordered red wine and steak. He crammed his food down and asked her what she thought about love. Immediately she was frightened. She was not frightened of seduction or of a scene. It was pure fear. He saw that it would not do, and sulked at her, pouring down his wine.

"I don't want to waste time. I've got to get down to reality. Tell Eden I'll call in later."

He took her out, and left her at the door of the restaurant, without a word.

He walked about London, through the streets round the

British Museum, on a cool still afternoon without rain, past the interesting shops and the students, and the great building of stone. He wanted to persuade men that they were only there to illustrate the worth of the land. He did not want to see Eden, who would be busy trying to stop the next war, and getting people to dress up. He knew what war was and how it would stop these games, more power to it. It was all up with the world, and the world didn't know it. He would go to tea with Daphne now. It would be too early but that didn't matter.

At the Museum gates he saw a man he had known, who said: "Is that you, Tressider? I didn't know you were in town."

"I came up last night."

"Wishing you were back?"

"Wishing I could smash these lumps of stone or get men to see their cosmic significance."

The civilised man winced. The idea might be tolerable, but one should not say it like that.

"I am going into the Museum. Come along?"

"What are you going to do?"

"Look at things."

"Some earth-shaking new cooking-pot?"

"It's not a question of size, is it? Come along."

He had to run beside Dick, who flung himself over the courtyard and up the steps.

"I read a jolly fairy-story about this place," he said. "Some children got a magic amulet and wished the things home, and they all flew out. Those stone bull things, and all the crocks and necklaces."

"I remember. They found a queen from Babylon, and she said they belonged to her, and wished them all home, and home they went."

Dick looked at him, with a sideways, ugly stare.

"I know. You like me, don't you, when you think I'm a fairy-boy. A kind of grown-up Puck? You like me to like rot."

"But I do," said his friend. "I like that story myself, and was glad when you recalled it."

"Do you know that the only thing we've said that meant

anything was a bit of your talk—"She said they all belonged to her." That's the cursed property-sense that keeps this world a hell."

"Oh damn the property sense! I was going to look at the casts from Yucatan, and I always forget the way."

Dick was staring at a case of bronze weapons. He put his hand easily on the man's shoulder.

"Don't you understand that that fairy-story is true? They could all fly away out of here. It's as easy as changing your collar?"

"Do it for us then, Tressider. I'll come along and applaud."

"My God! You people will find a man who can do it for you, and worse things, and soon. Someone you've treated as you treat all people. Take it from me, Brooks."

Madder than ever. Won't think, and can't play. "All right. The room's at the end. Come along."

It is not easy to get on terms with a cast the size of a house, whose close decorations mean nothing to anyone except to an archæologist or an artist. Dick lounged and stared, and leant up against the central plaster lump.

"What are all these things for? I suppose you think you've done something when you've dug 'em up out of the earth."

It is exceedingly difficult to explain why a thing is useful when you like it.

Dick smote it with his hand.

"A lot of good those'll do you when the world busts up."

But Brooks was thinking what a type was there, leaning on a sacred Maian monster, a fair ruling, fighting, riding man, and what twist of breeding had turned him prophet à la Semite, "sad when he held the harp." And that the harp that once—etc.—was now completely cracked.

"All right," he said, "we'll leave antiquities for the moment. But it's a speculation worth following: where did that civilisation come from, and did it have any contact with Egypt?"

"Egypt? They knew about the soul there, and I don't care where their jim-jam decorations came from. Civilisa-

tion's going. The world wants a man whose contact is primeval."

"Oh does it?" said Brooks. "I suppose you mean yourself. You're about as primeval as a card-index. Come and have some tea."

And at tea, Dick asked him sweetly about his children, and sent messages to his wife, and told the story of his uncle's funeral with point and wit, and left Brooks, to go up to Daphne, with his affection intact, and his doubts.

Now it was evening. The 'bus climbed up the side of London, and above the screaming children, and the crowd going home from work; it rolled like an animal ship and from every contact Dick sighed and withdrew himself, till at the five roads at Camden Town, he felt something coming which had come before. "This place is not here," he said. "I can lift myself out of it, in my body. So!" He sank down a little as he said it, and answered himself. "The things you hate are only your body being knocked about by phenomena." Then the place disappeared, especially a public-house with a plaster tower, but there had crept up through them tall, perpendicular folds, which looked like dark grey rubber, which rose and passed in from all sides. But he was free, both of the houses and what had replaced them. He lifted himself like a clean man out of the sea, and rested in his mind, which was now full of order and peace. He wondered that he had ever minded anything, and at the end of the ride stood several men drinks in a public house, and roared with laughter with them.

Before dinner, he came to Daphne's house, and rang the bell. There was some time before anyone answered it. Then her old nurse came, and looked at him without knowing who he was. He came in, and took off his rain-coat before he said: "Is Miss Daphne in?"

"I'll see, sir," she said, and led him into the living-room which had tall windows and a balcony on to a garden full of trees. The wind, a new thing, was moving in them. It was almost night. Next door was Daphne's room. He heard the door open and shut several times, and brief voices. The room was very empty. He stumbled over a

rug, and saw the shining boards and a gramophone gaping with the lid up, and records on the divan among the cushions. He did not make himself at ease by the fire. He understood that they had been dancing. He walked up and down the room, wondering what they would give him to eat.

It was all right. The peace was there. He would tell Daphne about it. Daphne would give it back to him with assent and vivid words. Perhaps he would take Daphne out to dinner. Her youngest sister came in.

"Please forgive us. We're in such a hurry. We've been dressing Daphne. Would you mind coming to see her in her room?"

He remembered Daphne's room, rows of books and glass balls and Chinese pictures of birds and windows that stepped out into the air. He followed her sister, and as he came in, heard Daphne's cry "Hullo, Dick!" that was like a battle yell. In a minute he was treading into a sea of tissue paper that rustled like snakes. The shutters were closed. All the lights were on. Here was night, suddenly and strongly lit. As Daphne came to meet him, her sister fell on her knees, and followed her over the carpet, pinning something at her hips.

A woman he did not know was sitting on the couch looking at Daphne. The old nurse was somewhere behind him, by the door.

"Shall I ring for a taxi, dearie?"

"In a minute, nurse, I've a few moments to spare." Then he trod on the paper like a man and saw her. She had on a green and white dress, and crystal earrings that touched her shoulders, and a crystal at her waist, slung round her neck with a green cord. Dick remembered enough to know that it was a dress that is not seen in shops, but is shown, "like an ear of corn reaped in silence" to certain women on certain occasions. He saw her feet in silver sandals, her hair like a black, painted doll's, a curve drawn out over each cheek. On the dressing table, white with powder, there was a bouquet in a frill.

"Dick, I'm going out to have a glorious time." She did not look at him twice to see what his heavy eyes said.

"Val, my dear, is the wet-white even on my back?" Valentine got up and took a powder-puff and dusted her sister's white back. She sat down again at her mirror, and called at him into the glass where she could see him. "Dick, sit down. You know my cousin, Mrs. Lee?" He would not know her, but sat down and stared, and saw that Daphne was like a tree in glory. And that the colour of her mouth was due to art. It was not trying to be anything else. If it was kissed, it would come off so much sticky paint. The room was warm, full of scent and whirling with powder-dust. He tried to hear the wind rising. He wanted to swear at Daphne and hit her.—In the mirror, he saw her little head sink an instant. He knew her. She was thinking, "Oh Dick, don't spoil my pleasure." Well, he would. Then she whipped round and smiled at him, deliberately, brutally, and he knew that he could not.

She was pulling on gloves like curd, picked up her flowers, and moved across the room.

"Nurse, ring for a taxi. Angry, Dick? I'm going to dance all night. Oh, it's good to get into decent clothes—"

He said vulgarly: "It seems to me that you've got out of them," and she looked at him exactly as she would look at a man of his kind who said a thing like that.

He felt his power drain out of him, his poise, assurance, pride. He had come to tell Daphne about heavenly things.

As he waited and hated her, she forgot even who he was.

"Say you like my dress. I must hear everyone say it."

"I suppose it's fashionable, but I remember you in the shrubberies at Pharrs in a cotton dress. You came for a walk with me."

"Oh yes. I remember Pharrs—that reminds me—"

It had not reminded her of him. She turned and went quickly to the glass again, and spoke to her cousin beside him.

"Trini. I'm not certain, but I think it wants a head-dress." She pulled out a wreath of bright green leaves, and set it on her head.

They were like the leaves of no earthly laurel. He shuddered and called "Daphne!" Her cousin agreed with her.

Her taxi came. She said:

"Dick, I'm sorry I've had no time tonight. Can I give you a lift down town?"

She flung on a silver cloak, and he followed her down the steps, into the taxi. The wind was rising, and drummed on the window-glass. They ran in silence down London. It was very cold. He saw where she was going; into a high square house, and down to dinner with a black and white man, down golden stairs.

She looked at him again.

"Cheer up, Dick. Don't you like to get back to it all when you come to town?"

She had won. He had not known how to express his disgust, now he did not know if he felt it.

"I suppose I miss it sometimes."

"Look here. We've a party at the Savoy on Saturday, and we want another man. Will you come?"

He would not come. Anything might happen in the world, but he would not come.

"I'm afraid I should be out of place. You would find my change of values too complete."

"Should we indeed! There are several Paradises, Dick. Me for this Paradise."

She had known all the time. He must say something destructive, inimical, quickly. Only she had forgotten him again.

"Oh," she said, "it's cold," and drew in her silver stuff. Without concern he put his oily rough raincoat over the silver, the white and green, the milky back that came off a little. She made a little face, said "Thank you" and forgot.

The wind roared through the square. She opened the door, two half-crowns in her hand.

"Here's my share. Good-night, Dick. Come and see me some time. Good-night, Dick."

He did not want the taxi any more. He only wanted to meet the wind, and let nature knock the nonsense out of him, and the memories. He took the half-crowns from her, and she was out into the street before he could find his stick. He did not help her. She was gone. The wind

went roaring past. He paid the man, and at the last instant before night, saw her run up the steps, and the wind take her cloak and open it. He saw her bend like a full sail, and balance to the wind. He saw her head go down, and her silver shoes run up. The door opened, he saw her run into a tall yellow arch, and the black door immediately close on her again.

THE HIGGLER¹

By A. E. COPPARD

(From *The Transatlantic Review*)

ON a cold April afternoon a higgler was driving across Shag Moor in a two-wheeled cart.

H. WITLOW

Dealer in Poultry

DINNOP

was painted on the hood; the horse was of mean appearance but notorious ancestry. A high upland common was this moor, two miles from end to end, and full of furze and bracken. There were no trees and not a house, nothing but a line of telegraph poles following the road, sweeping with rigidity from north to south; nailed upon one of them a small scarlet notice to stone throwers was prominent as a wound. On so high and wide a region as Shag Moor the wind always blew, or if it did not quite blow there was a cool activity in the air. The furze was always green and growing, and taking no account of seasons, often golden. Here in summer solitude lounged and snoozed; at other times, as now, it shivered and looked sinister.

Higglers in general are ugly and shrewd, old and hard, crafty and callous, but Harvey Witlow though shrewd was not ugly; he was hard but not old, crafty but not at all unkind. If you had eggs to sell he would buy them, by the score he would, or by the long hundred. Other odds and ends he would buy or do, paying good bright silver, bartering a bag of apples, carrying your little pig to market, or fetching a tree from the nurseries. But the season was backward, eggs were scarce, trade was bad—by crumps, it was indeed!—and as he crossed the moor Harvey could not help discussing the situation with himself.

"If things don't change, and change for the better, and

¹ Copyright, 1924, by A. E. Coppard.

change soon, I can't last and I can't endure it; I'll be damned and done, and the quicker I'll have to sell," he said, prodding the animal with the butt of his whip "this cob. And" he said, as if in afterthought, prodding the footboard "this cart, and go back to the land. And I'll have lost my fifty pounds. Well that's what war does for you. It does it for you, sir," he announced sharply to the vacant moor, "and it does it for me. Fifty pounds! I was better off in the war. I was better off working for farmers; much; but it's no good chattering about it, it's the trick of life; when you get so far then you can go and order your funeral. Get along, Dodger!"

The horse responded briskly for a few moments.

"I tell ye," said Harvey adjuring the ambient air, "you can go and order your funeral. Get along, Dodger!"

Again Dodger got along.

"Then there's Sophy, what about Sophy and me?"

He was not engaged to Sophy Daws, not exactly, but he was keeping company with her. He was not pledged or affianced, he was just keeping company with her. But Sophy, as he knew, not only desired a marriage with Mr. Witlow, she expected it, and expected it soon. So did her parents, her friends and everybody in the village, including the postman who didn't live in it but wished he did, and the parson who did live in it but wished he didn't.

"Well, that's damned and done, fair damned and done now, unless things take a turn, and soon, so it's no good chattering about it."

And just then and there things did take a turn. He had never been across the moor before; he was prospecting for trade. At the end of Shag Moor he saw standing back in the common, fifty yards from the road, a neat square house set in a little farm. Twenty acres, perhaps. The house was girded by some white palings; beside it was a snug orchard in a hedge covered with blackthorn bloom. It was very green and pleasant in front of the house. The turf was cleared and closely cropped, some ewes were grazing and under the blackthorn, out of the wind, lay half a dozen lambs, but what chiefly moved the imagination of Harvey Witlow was a field on the far side of the house.

It had a small rickyard with a few small stacks in it; everything here seemed on the small scale, but snug, very snug; and in that field and yard were hundreds of fowls, hundreds, of good breed, and mostly white. Leaving his horse to sniff the greensward, the higgler entered a white wicket gateway and passed to the back of the house, noting as he did so a yellow waggon inscribed *Elizabeth Sadgrove, Prattle Corner*.

At the kitchen door he was confronted by a tall gaunt woman of middle age with a teapot in her hands.

"Afternoon, ma'am. Have you anything to sell?" began Harvey Witlow, tilting his hat with a confident affable air. The tall woman was cleanly dressed, a superior person; her hair was grey. She gazed at him.

"It's cold," he continued. She looked at him as uncomprehendingly as a mouse might look at a gravestone.

"I'll buy any mottal thing, ma'am. Except trouble; I'm full up wi' that already. Eggs? Fowls?"

"I've not seen you before," commented Mrs. Sadgrove a little bleakly, in a deep husky voice.

"No, 'tis the first time as ever I drove in this part. To tell you the truth, ma'am, I'm new to the business. Six months. I was in the war a year ago. Now I'm trying to knock up a connection. Difficult work. Things are very quiet."

Mrs. Sadgrove silently removed the lid of the teapot, inspected the interior of the pot with an intent glance, and then replaced the lid as if she had seen a blackbeetle there.

"Ah, well," sighed the higgler. "You've a neat little farm here, ma'am."

"It's quiet enough," said she.

"Sure it is, ma'am. Very lonely."

"And it's difficult work, too." Mrs. Sadgrove almost smiled.

"Sure it is, ma'am; but you does it well, I can see. O, you've some nice little ricks of corn, ah! I does well enough at the dealing now and again, but it's teasy work, and mostly I don't earn enough to keep my horse in shoe leather."

"I've a few eggs, perhaps," said she.

"I could do with a score or two, ma'am, if you could let me have 'em."

"You'll have to come all my way if I do."

"Name your own price, ma'am, if you don't mind trading with me."

"Mind! Your money's as good as my own, isn't it?"

"It must be, ma'am. That's meaning no disrespect to you," the young higgler assured her hastily, and was thereupon invited to enter the kitchen.

A stone floor with two or three mats; open hearth with burning logs; a big dresser painted brown, carrying a row of white cups on brass hooks and shelves of plates overlapping each other like the scales of fish. A dark settle half hid a flight of stairs with a small gate at the top. Under the window a black sofa, deeply indented, invited you a little repellingly, and in the middle of the room stood a large table, exquisitely scrubbed, with one end of it laid for tea. Evidently a living-room as well as kitchen. A girl, making toast at the fire, turned as the higgler entered. Beautiful she was: red hair, a complexion like the inside of a nut, blue eyes, and the hands of a lady. He saw it all at once, jacket of bright green wool, black dress, grey stockings and shoes, and forgot his errand, her mother, his fifty pounds, Sophy—momentarily he forgot everything. The girl stared strangely at him. He was tall, clean shaven, with a loop of black hair curling handsomely over one side of his brow.

"Good afternoon," said Harvey Witlow, as softly as if he had entered a church.

"Some eggs, Mary," Mrs. Sadgrove explained. The girl laid down her toasting fork. She was less tall than her mother, whom she resembled only enough for the relationship to be noted. Silently she crossed the kitchen and opened a door that led into a dairy. Two pans of milk were creaming on a bench there, and on the flags were two great baskets filled with eggs.

"How many are there?" asked Mrs. Sadgrove, and the girl replied: "Fifteen score, I think."

"Take the lot, higgler?"

"Yes, ma'am," he cried eagerly, and ran out to his cart

and fetched a number of trays. In them he packed the eggs as the girl handed them to him from the baskets. Mrs. Sadgrove left them together. For a time the higgler was silent.

"No," at length he murmured, "I've never been this road before."

There was no reply from Mary. Sometimes their fingers touched, and often, as they bent over the eggs, her bright hair almost brushed his face.

"It is a loneish spot," he ventured again.

"Yes," said Mary Sadgrove.

When the eggs were all transferred her mother came in again.

"Would you buy a few pullets, higgler?"

"Any number, ma'am," he declared quickly. Any number; by crumps, the tide was turning. He followed the mother into the yard, and there again she left him, waiting. He mused about the girl and wondered about the trade. If they offered him ten thousand chicken, he'd buy them, somehow, he would. She had stopped in the kitchen. Just in there she was, just behind him, a few feet away. Over the low wall of the yard a fat black pony was strolling in a field of bright greensward. In the yard, watching him, was a young gander, and on a stone staddle beside it lay a dead thrush on its back, its legs stiff in the air. The girl stayed in the kitchen; she was moving about though, he could hear her; perhaps she was spying at him through the window. Twenty million eggs he would buy if Mrs. Sadgrove had got them. She was gone a long time. It was very quiet. The gander began to comb its white breast with its beak. Its three-toed feet were a most tender pink, shaped like wide diamonds, and at each of the three forward points there was a toe like a small blanched nut. It lifted one foot, folding the webs, and hid it under its wing and sank into a resigned meditation on one leg. It had a blue eye that was meek—it had two but you could only see one at a time—a meek blue eye, set in a pink rim that gave it a dissolute air, and its beak had raw red nostrils as if it suffered from the damp. Altogether a beautiful bird. And in some absurd way it resembled Mrs. Sadgrove.

"Would you sell that young gollan, ma'am?" Harvey enquired when the mother returned.

Yes, she would sell him, and she also sold him two dozen pullets. Harvey packed the fowls in a crate.

"Come on," he cried cuddling the squawling gander in his arms, "you needn't be afeard of me, I never kills anything afore Saturdays."

He roped it by its leg to a hook inside his cart. Then he took out his bag of money, paid Mrs. Sadgrove her dues, said "Good day, ma'am, good day," and drove off without seeing another sign or stitch of that fine young girl.

"Get along, Dodger, get along wi' you." They went bowling along for nearly an hour, and then he could see the landmark on Dan'el Green's Hill, a windmill that never turned though it looked a fine competent piece of architecture, just beyond Dinnop.

Soon he reached his cottage and was chafing his mother, a hearty buxom dame, who stayed at home and higgled with any chance callers. At this business she was perhaps more enlightened than her son. It was almost a misfortune to get into her clutches.

"How much you give for this?" he cried, eyeing with humourous contempt an object in a coop that was neither flesh nor rude red herring.

"O crumps," he declared, when she told him: "I am damned and done!"

"Go on with you, that's a good bird, I tell you, with a full heart, as will lay in a month."

"I doubt it's a hen at all," he protested. "O what a ravenous beak! Damned and done I am."

Mrs. Witlow's voice began indignantly to rise.

"O well," mused her son, "it's thrifty perhaps. It ain't quite right, but it's not so wrong as to make a fuss about, especially as I be pretty sharp set. And if it's hens you want," he continued triumphantly, dropping the crate of huddled fowls before her, "there's hens for you; and a gander! There's a gander for you, if it's a gander you want."

Leaving them all in his cottage yard he went and stalled the horse and cart at the inn, for he had no stable of his

own. After supper he told his mother about the Sadgroves of Prattle Corner. "Prettiest girl you ever seen, but the shyest mottal alive. Hair like a squirrel, lovely."

"An't you got to go over and see Sophy tonight," enquired his mother, lighting the lamp.

"O lord, if I an't clean forgot that. Well I'm tired, shan't go tonight. See her tomorrow."

Mrs. Sadgrove had been a widow for ten years—and she was glad of it. Prattle Corner was her property, she owned it and farmed it with the aid of a little old man and a large lad. The older this old man grew, and the less wages he received (for Elizabeth Sadgrove was reputed a "grinder"), the more ardently he worked; the older the lad grew the less he laboured and the more he swore. She was thriving. She was worth money was Mrs. Sadgrove. Ah! And her daughter Mary, it was clear, had received an education fit for a lord's lady. She had been at a seminary for gentlefolks' females until she was seventeen. Well, whether or no, a clock must run as you time it; but it wronged her for the work of a farm, it spoiled her, it completely deranged her for the work of a farm; and this was a pity and foolish, because some day the farm was coming to her as didn't know hay from a bull's foot.

All this, and more, the young higgler quickly learned and plenty more he soon divined. Business began to flourish with him now; his despair was gone, he was established, he could look forward, to whatever it was he wanted to look forward, with equanimity and such pleasurable anticipation as the chances and charges of life might engender. Every week, and twice a week, he would call at the farm, and though these occasions had their superior business inducements they often borrowed a less formal tone and intention.

"Take a cup of tea, higgler?" Mrs. Sadgrove would abruptly invite him; and he would drink tea and discourse with her for half an hour on barn-door ornithology, on harness, and markets, the treatment of swine, the wear and tear of gear. Mary, always present, was always silent, seldom uttering a word to the higgler; yet a certain grace emanated from her to him, an interest, a light, a favour,

circumscribed indeed by some modesty, shyness, some inhibition, that neither had the wit or the opportunity to overcome.

One evening he pulled up at the white palings of Prattle Corner. It was a calm evening in May, the sun was on its downgoing, chaffinches and wrens sung ceaselessly. Mary in the orchard was heavily veiled; he could see her over the hedge, holding a brush in her gloved hands, and a bee skep. A swarm was clustered like a great gnarl on the limb of an apple tree. Bloom was thickly covering the twigs. She made several timid attempts to brush the bees into the skep but they resented this.

"They knows if you be afraid of 'em"; bawled Harvey, "I better come and give you a hand."

When he took the skep and brush from her she stood like one helpless, released by fate from a task ill-understood and gracelessly waived. But he liked her shyness, her almost uncouth immobility.

"Never mind about that," said Harvey, as she unfastened her veil, scattering the white petals that had collected upon it; "when they kicks they hurts, but I've been stung so often that I'm 'nocolated against 'em. They knows if you be afraid of 'em."

Wearing neither veil nor gloves he went confidently to the tree, and collected the swarm without mishap.

"Don't want to show no fear of them," said Harvey. "Nor of anything else, come to that," he added with a guffaw, "nor anybody."

At that she blushed and thanked him very softly, and she did look straight and clearly at him.

Never anything beyond a blush and a thank-you. When in the kitchen, or the parlour, Mrs. Sadgrove sometimes left them alone together, Harvey would try a lot of talk, blarneying talk or sensible talk, or talk about events in the world that was neither the one nor the other. No good. The girl's responses were ever brief and confused. Why was this? Again and again he asked himself that question. Was there anything the matter with her? Nothing that you could see; she was a bright and beautiful being. And it was not contempt, either, for despite her fright, her

voicelessness, her timid eyes, he divined her friendly feeling for himself; and he would discourse to his own mother about her and her mother.

"They are well-up people, you know, well off, plenty of money and nothing to do with it. The farm's their own, freehold. A whole row of cottages she's got, too, in Smoor-ton Comfrey, so I heard; good cottages, well let. She's worth a few thousands, I warrant. Mary's beautiful. I took a fancy to that girl the first moment I see her. But she's very highly cultivated—and, of course, there's Sophy."

To this enigmatic statement, Mrs. Witlow offered no response; but mothers are inscrutable beings to their sons, always.

Once he bought some trees of cherries from Mrs. Sad-grove and went on a July morning to pick the fruit. Under the trees Mary was walking slowly to and fro, twirling a clapper to scare away the birds. He stood watching her from the gateway. Among the bejewelled trees she passed, turning the rattle with a listless air, as if beating time to a sad music that only she could hear. The man knew that he was deeply fond of her. He passed into the orchard, bade her good-morning, and, lifting his ladder into one of the trees nearest the hedge, began to pluck cherries. Mary moved slimly in her white frock up and down a shady avenue in the orchard waving the clapper. The brightness of sun and sky was almost harsh; there was a little wind that feebly lifted the despondent leaves. He had doffed his coat; his shirt was white and clean. The lock of dark hair drooped over one side of his forehead; his face was brown and pleasant, his bare arms brown and powerful. From his high perch among the leaves Witlow watched for the girl to draw near to him in her perambulation. Knavish birds would scatter at her approach, only to drop again into the trees she had passed. His soul had an immensity of longing for her, but she never spoke a word to him. She would come from the shade of the little avenue, through the dumb trees that could only bend to greet her, into the sunlight whose dazzle gilded her own triumphant bloom. Fine! Fine! And always as she passed his mind refused to register a single

thought he could offer her, or else his tongue would refuse to utter it. But his glance never left her face until she had passed out of sight again, and then he would lean against the ladder in the tree, staring down at the ground, seeing nothing or less than nothing, except a field mouse climbing to the top of a coventry bush in the hedge below him, nipping off one thick leaf and descending with the leaf in its mouth. Sometimes Mary rested at the other end of the avenue; the clapper would be silent and she would not appear for—O, hours! She never rested near the trees Witlow was denuding. The mouse went on ascending and descending, and Witlow filled his basket, and shifted his stand, and wondered.

At noon he got down and sat on the hedge bank to eat a snack of lunch. Mary had gone indoors for hers, and he was alone for a while. Capriciously enough, his thoughts dwelt upon Sophy Daws. Sophy was a fine girl, too; not such a lady as Mary Sadgrove—O lord, no! Her father was a gamekeeper!—But she was jolly and ample. She had been a little captious lately, said he was neglecting her. That wasn't true; hadn't he been busy? Besides, he wasn't bound to her in any sort of way, and of course he couldn't afford any marriage yet awhile. Sophy hadn't got any money, never had any. What she did with her wages—she was a parlour-maid—was a teaser! Harvey grunted a little, and said "Well!" And that is all he said, and all he thought, about Sophy Daws then, for he could hear Mary's clapper begin again in a corner of the orchard. He went back to his work. There at the foot of the tree were the baskets full of cherries, and those yet to be filled.

"Phew, but that's hot!" commented the man, "I'm as dry as a rattle."

A few cherries had spilled from one basket and lay on the ground. The little furry mouse had found them and was industriously nibbling at one. The higgler nonchalantly stamped his foot upon it, and kept it so for a moment or two. Then he looked at the dead mouse. A tangle of entrails had gushed from its whiskered muzzle.

He resumed his work and the clapper rattled on throughout the afternoon, for there were other cherry trees that

other buyers would come to strip in a day or two. At four o'clock he was finished. Never a word had he spoken with Mary, or she with him. When he went over to the house to pay Mrs. Sadgrove, Mary stopped in the orchard scaring the birds.

"Take a cup of tea, Mr. Witlow," said Mrs. Sadgrove; and then she surprisingly added: "Where's Mary?"

"Still a-frightening the birds, and pretty well tired of that, I should think, ma'am."

The mother had poured out three cups of tea.

"Shall I go and call her in?" he asked, rising.

"You might," said she.

In the orchard the clapping had ceased. He walked all round, and in among the trees, but saw no sign of Mary; nor on the common, nor in the yard. But when he went back to the house Mary was there already, chatting at the table with her mother. She did not greet him, though she ceased talking to her mother as he sat down. After drinking his tea he went off briskly to load the baskets into the cart. As he climbed up to drive off Mrs. Sadgrove came out and stood beside the horse.

"You're off now?" said she.

"Yes, ma'am; all loaded, and thank you."

She glanced vaguely along the road he had to travel. The afternoon was as clear as wine, the greensward itself dazzled him; lonely Shag Moor stretched away, humped with sweet yellow furze and pilastered with its telegraph poles. No life there, no life at all. Harvey sat on his driving board, musingly brushing the flank of his horse with the trailing whip.

"Ever round this way on Sundays?" enquired the woman, peering up at him.

"Well, not in a manner of speaking, I'm not, ma'am," he answered her.

The widow laid her hand on the horse's back, patting vaguely. The horse pricked up its ears, as if it were listening.

"If you are, at all, ever, you must look in and have a bit of dinner with us."

"I will, ma'am, I will."

"Next Sunday?" she went on.

"I will, ma'am, yes, I will," he repeated, "and thank you."

"One o'clock?" The widow smiled up at him.

"At one o'clock, ma'am; next Sunday; I will, and thank you," he said.

She stood away from the horse and waved her hand. The first tangible thought that floated mutely out of the higgler's mind as he drove away was: "I'm damned if I ain't a-going it, Sophy!"

He told his mother of Mrs. Sadgrove's invitation with an air of curbed triumph. "Come round—she says. Yes—I says—I 'ull. That's right—she says—so do!"

On the Sunday morn he dressed himself gallantly. It was again a sweet unclouded day. The church bell at Dinnop had begun to ring. From his window, as he fastened his most ornate tie, Harvey could observe his neighbour's two small children in the next garden, a boy and girl clad for church-going and each carrying a clerical book. The tiny boy placed his sister in front of a hen roost and, opening his book, began to pace to and fro before her, shrilly intoning: "Jesus is the shepherd, ring the bell. O lord, ring the bell, am I a good boy? Amen. O lord, ring the bell." The little girl bowed her head piously over her book. The lad then picked up from the ground a dish which had contained the dog's food, and presented it momentarily before the lilac bush, the rabbit in a hutch, the axe fixed in a chopping block, and then before his sister. Without lifting her peering gaze from her book she meekly dropped two pebbles in the plate, and the boy passed on, lightly moaning, to the clothes-line post and a cock scooping in some dust.

"Ah, the little impets!" cried Harvey Witlow. "Here Toby! Here Margaret!" He took two pennies from his pocket and lobbed them from the window to the astonished children. As they stooped to pick up the coins Harvey heard the hoarse voice of neighbour Nathan, their father, bawl from his kitchen: "Come on in, and shut that bloody door, d'y'ear!"

Harnessing his moody horse to the gig Harvey was soon bowling away to Shag Moor, and as he drove along he sung

loudly. He had a pink rose in his buttonhole. Mrs. Sadgrove received him almost affably, and though Mary was more shy than ever before, Harvey had determined to make an impression. During the dinner he fired off his bucolic jokes, and pleasant tattle of a more respectful and sober nature; but after dinner Mary sat like Patience, not upon a monument but as if upon a rocking-horse, shy and fearful, and her mother made no effort to inspire her as the higgler did, unsuccessful though he was. They went to the pens to look at the pigs, and as they leaned against the low walls and poked the maudlin inhabitants, Harvey began: "Reminds me, when I was in the war . . ."

"Were you in the war!" interrupted Mrs. Sadgrove.

"Oh yes, I was in that war, ah, and there was a pig . . . Danger? O lord bless me it was a bit dangerous, but you never knew where it was or what it 'ud be at next; it was like the sword of Damockels. There was a bullet once come 'ithin a foot of my head, and it went through a board an inch thick, slap through that board." Both women gazed at him apprehendingly. "Why I might 'a been killed, you know," said Harvey, cocking his eye musingly at the weather vane on the barn. "We was in billets at St. Gratien, and one day a chasseur came up—a French yoossar, you know—and he began talking to our sergeant. That was Hubert Luxter, the butcher: died a month or two ago of measles. But this yoossar couldn't speak English at all, and none of us chaps could make sense of him. I never could understand that lingo somehow, never; and though there was half a dozen of us chaps there, none of us were man enough for it, neither. 'Nil compree' we says 'non compos.' I told him straight: 'You ought to learn English,' I said, it's much easier than your kind of bally chatter.' So he kept shaping up as if he was holding a rifle, and then he'd say 'Fusee—bang!' and then he'd say 'cushion'—kept on saying 'cushion.' Then he gets a bit of chalk and draws on the wall something that looks like a horrible dog, and says 'cushion' again."

"Pig," interjected Mary Sadgrove, softly.

"Yes, yes!" ejaculated Harvey, "so 'twas! Do you know any French lingo?"

"O yes," declared her mother, "Mary knows it very well,"
"Ah," sighed the higgler. "I don't, although I been to France. And I couldn't do it now, not for luck nor love. You learnt it, I suppose. Well, this yoossar wants to borrow my rifle, but of course I can't lend him. So he taps on this horrible pig he'd drawn, and then he taps on his own head, and rolls his eyes about dreadful! 'Mad?' I says. And that was it, that was it. He'd got a pig on his little farm there what had gone mad, and he wanted us to come and shoot it; he was on leave and he hadn't got any ammunition. So Hubert Luxter he says 'Come on, some of you,' and we all goes with the yoossar and shot the pig for him. Ah, that was a pig! And when it died it jumped a somersault just like a rabbit. It had got the mange, and was mad as anything I ever see in my life; it was full of madness. Couldn't hit him at all at first, and it kicked up bobs-a-dying. 'Ready, present, fire!' Hubert Luxter says and bang goes the six of us, and every time we missed him he spotted us and we had to run for our lives."

As Harvey looked up he caught a glance of the girl fixed on him. She dropped her gaze at once and, turning away, walked off to the house.

"Come and take a look at the meadow," said Mrs. Sadgrove to him, and they went into the soft smooth meadow where the black pony was grazing. Very bright and green it was, and very blue the sky. He sniffed at the pink rose in his buttonhole, and determined that come what may he would give it to Mary if he could get a nice quiet chance to offer it. And just then, while he and Mrs. Sadgrove were strolling alone in the soft smooth meadow, quite alone, she suddenly, startlingly, asked him: "Are you courting anybody?"

"Beg pardon, ma'am?" he exclaimed.

"You haven't got a sweetheart, have you?" she asked, most deliberately.

Harvey grinned sheepishly: "Ha, ha, ha," and then he said, "No."

"I want to see my daughter married," the widow went on, significantly.

"Miss Mary!" he cried.

"Yes," said she; and something in the higgler's veins began to pound rapidly. His breast might have been a revolving cage and his heart a demon squirrel. "I can't live for ever," said Mrs. Sadgrove, almost with levity, "in fact, not for long, and so I'd like to see her settled soon with some decent understanding young man, one that could carry on here, and not make a mess of things."

"But, but," stuttered the understanding young man, "I'm no scholar, and she's a lady. I'm a poor chap, rough, and no scholar, ma'am. But mind you . . ."

"That doesn't matter at all," the widow interrupted, "not as things are. You want a scholar for learning, but for the land . . ."

"Ah, that's right, Mrs. Sadgrove, but . . ."

"I want to see her settled. This farm, you know, with the stock and things are worth nigh upon three thousand pounds."

"You want a farmer for farming, that's true, Mrs. Sadgrove, but when you come to marriage, well, with her learning and French and all that . . .!"

"A sensible woman will take a man rather than a box of tricks any day of the week," the widow retorted. "Education may be a fine thing, but it often costs a lot of foolish money."

"It do, it do. You want to see her settled?"

"I want to see her settled and secure. When she is twenty-five she comes into five hundred pounds of her own right."

The distracted higgler hummed and haa-ed in his bewilderment as if he had just been offered the purchase of a dubious duck. "How old is she, ma'am?" he at last huskily, enquired.

"Two and twenty nearly. She's a good healthy girl for I've never spent a pound on a doctor for her, and very quiet she is, and very sensible; but she's got a strong will of her own, though you might not think it or believe it."

"She's a fine creature, Mrs. Sadgrove, and I'm very fond of her, I don't mind owning up to that, very fond of her I am."

"Well, think it over, take your time, and see what you think. There's no hurry I hope, please God."

"I shan't want much time," he declared with a laugh, "but I doubt I'm the fair right sort for her."

"O, fair days, fair doings!" said she inscrutably. "I'm not a long liver, I'm afraid."

"God forbid, ma'am!" His ejaculation was intoned with deep gravity.

"No, I'm not a long-living woman." She surveyed him with her calm eyes, and he returned her gaze. Hers was a long sallow face, with heavy lips. Sometimes she would stretch her features (as if to keep them from petrifying) in an elastic grin, and display her dazzling teeth; the lips would curl thickly, no longer crimson, but blue. He wondered if there were any sign of a doom registered upon her gaunt face. She might die, and die soon.

"You couldn't do better than think it over, then, eh?" she had a queer frown as she regarded him.

"I couldn't do worse than not, Mrs. Sadgrove," he said gaily.

They left it at that. He had no reason for hurrying away, and he couldn't have explained his desire to do so, but he hurried away. Driving along past the end of the moor, and peering back at the lonely farm where they dwelled amid the thick furze snoozing in the heat, he remembered that he had not asked if Mary was willing to marry him! Perhaps the widow took her agreement for granted. That would be good fortune, for otherwise how the devil was he to get round a girl who had never spoken half a dozen words to him! And never would! She was a lady, a girl of fortune, knew her French; but there it was, the girl's own mother was asking him to wed her. Strange, very strange! He dimly feared something, but he did not know what it was he feared. He had still got the pink rose in his buttonhole.

At first his mother was incredulous; when he told her of the astonishing proposal she declared he was a joker; but she was soon as convinced of his sincerity as she was amazed at his hesitation. And even vexed: "Was there anything the matter with this Mary?"

"No, no, no! She's quiet, very quiet indeed I tell you, but a fine young woman, and a beautiful young woman. O, she's all right, right as rain, right as a trivet, right as ninepence. But there's a catch in it somewheres, I fear. I can't see through it yet, but I shall afore long, or I'd have the girl, like a shot I would. "Tain't the girl, mother, it's the money, if you understand me."

"Well, I don't understand you, certainly I don't. What about Sophy?"

"O lord!" He scratched his head ruefully.

"You wouldn't think of giving this the go-by for Sophy, Harvey, would you! A girl as you ain't even engaged to, Harvey, would you!"

"We don't want to chatter about that," declared her son. "I got to think it over, and it's going to tie my wool, I can tell you, for there's a bit of craft somewheres, I'll take my oath. If there ain't, there ought to be!"

Over the alluring project his decision wavered for days, until his mother became mortified at his inexplicable vacillation.

"I tell you," he cried, "I can't make tops or bottoms of it all. I like the girl well enough, but I like Sophy, too, and it's no good beating about the bush. I like Sophy, she's the girl I love; but Mary's a fine creature, and money like that wants looking at before you throw it away, love or no love. Three thousand pounds! I'd be a made man."

And as if in sheer spite to his mother; as if a bushel of money lay on the doorstep for him to kick over whenever the fancy seized him; in short (as Mrs. Witlow very clearly intimated) as if in contempt of Providence he began to pursue Sophy Daws with a new fervour, and walked with that young girl more than he was accustomed to, more than ever before; in fact, as his mother bemoaned, more than he had need to. It was unreasonable, it was a shame, a foolishness; it wasn't decent and it wasn't safe.

On his weekly visits to the farm his mind still wavered. Mrs. Sadgrove let him alone; she was very good, she did not pester him with questions and entreaties. There was Mary with her white dress and her red hair and her silence; a girl with a great fortune, walking about the yard, or sitting

in the room, and casting not a glance upon him. Not that he would have known it if she did, for now he was just as shy of her. Mrs. Sadgrove often left them alone, but when they were alone he could not dish up a word for the pretty maid; he was dumb as a statue. If either she or her mother had lifted so much as a finger then there would have been an end to his hesitations or suspicions, for in Mary's presence the fine glory of the girl seized him incontinently; he was again full of a longing to press her lips, to lay down his doubts, to touch her bosom—though he could not think she would ever allow that! Not an atom of doubt about *her* ever visited him; she was unaware of her mother's queer project. Rather, if she became aware he was sure it would be the end of him. Too beautiful she was, too learned, and too rich. Decidedly it was his native cunning, and no want of love, that inhibited him. Folks with property did not often come along and bid you help yourself. Not very often! And throw in a grand bright girl, just for good measure as you might say. Not very often!

For weeks the higgler made his customary calls, and each time the outcome was the same; no more, no less. "Some dodge," he mused, "something the girl don't know and the mother does." Were they going bankrupt, or were they mortgaged up to the neck, or was there anything the matter with the girl, or was it just the mother wanted to get hold of him? He knew his own value if he didn't know his own mind, and his value couldn't match that girl any more than his mind could. So what *did* they want him for? Whatever it was, Harvey Witlow was ready for it whenever he was in Mary's presence, but once away from her his own craftiness asserted itself: it was a snare, they were trying to make a mock of him!

But nothing could prevent his own mother mocking him, and her treatment of Sophy was so unbearable that if the heart of that dusky beauty had not been proof against all impediments, Harvey might have had to whistle for her favour. But whenever he was with Sophy he had only one heart, undivided and true, and certain as time itself.

"I love Sophy best. It's true enough I love Mary, too, but I love Sophy better. I know it; Sophy's the girl I

must wed. It might not be so if I weren't all dashed and doddered about the money; I don't know. But I do know that Mary's innocent of all this craftiness; it's her mother trying to mogue me into it."

Later he would be wishing he could only forget Sophy and do it. Without the hindrance of conscience he could do it, catch or no catch.

He went on calling at the farm, with nothing said or settled, until October. Then Harvey made up his mind, and without a word to the Sadgroves he went and married Sophy Daws and gave up calling at the farm altogether. This gave him some feeling of dishonesty, some qualm, and a vague unhappiness; likewise he feared the cold hostility of Mrs. Sadgrove. She would be terribly vexed. As for Mary, he was nothing to her, poor girl; it was a shame. The last time he drove that way he did not call at the farm. Autumn was advancing, and the apples were down, the bracken dying, the furze out of bloom, and the farm on the moor looked more and more lonely, and most cold, though it lodged a flame-haired silent woman, fit for a nobleman, whom they wanted to mate with a common higgler. Crafty, you know, too crafty!

The marriage was a gay little occasion, but they did not go away for a honeymoon. Sophy's grandmother from a distant village, Cassandra Fundy, who had a deafness and a speckled skin, brought her third husband, Amos, whom the family had never seen before. Not a very wise man, indeed he was a common man, stooping like a decayed tree, he was so old. But he shaved every day and his hairless skull was yellow. Cassandra, who was yellow too, had long since turned into a fool; she did not shave, though she ought to have done. She was like to die soon, but everybody said old Amos would live to be a hundred; it was expected of him, and he, too, was determined.

The guests declared that a storm was threatening, but Amos Fundy denied it and scorned it.

"Thunder p'raps, but 'twill clear; 'tis only de pride o' der morning."

"Don't you be a fool," remarked his wife, enigmatically, "you'll die soon enough."

"You must behold der moon"; continued the octogenarian; "de closer it is to der wheel, de closer der rain; de furdur away it is, de furdur der rain."

"You could pour that man's brains into a thimble," declared Cassandra of her spouse, "and they wouldn't fill it—he's deaf."

Fundy was right; the day did clear. The marriage was made and the guests returned with the man and his bride to their home. But Fundy was also wrong, for storm came soon after and rain set in. The guests stayed on for tea, and then, as it was no better, they feasted and stayed till night. And Harvey began to think they never would go, but of course they couldn't and so there they were. Sophy was looking wonderful in white stockings and shiny shoes and a red frock with a tiny white apron. A big girl she seemed, with her shaken dark hair and flushed face. Grandmother Fundy spoke seriously, but not secretly to her.

"I've had my fourteen touch of children," said Grandmother Fundy. "Yes, they were flung on the mercy of God—poor little devils. I've followed most of 'em to the churchyard. You go slow, Sophia."

"Yes, Granny."

"Why," continued Cassandra, embracing the whole company, as it were with her disclosure, "my mother had me by some gentleman!"

The announcement aroused no response except sympathetic, and perhaps encouraging, nods from the woman.

"She had me by some gentleman—she ought to ha' had a twal' month, she did!"

"Wasn't she ever married?" Sophy enquired of her grandmother.

"Married? Yes, course she was," replied the old dame, "of course. But marriage ain't everything. Twice she was, but not to he, she wasn't."

"Not to the gentleman?"

"No! Oh no! He'd got money—bushels! Marriage ain't much, not with these gentry."

"Ho, ho, that's a tidy come-up!" laughed Harvey.

"Who was the gentleman?" Sophy's interest was deeply

engaged. But Cassandra Fundy was silent, pondering like a china image. Her gaze was towards the mantelpiece, where there were four lamps—but only one usable—and two clocks—but only one going—and a coloured greeting card a foot long with large letters *KEEP SMILING* adorned with lithographic honeysuckle.

"She's hard of hearing," interpolated Grandfather Amos, "very hard, gets worse. She've a horn at home, big as that . . ." His eyes roved the room for an object of comparison, and he seized upon the fire shovel that lay in the fender. "Big as that shovel. Crown silver it is, and solid, a beautiful horn, but"—he brandished the shovel before them—"her won't use 'en."

"Granny, who was that gentleman?" shouted Sophy. "Did you know him?"

"No! no!" declared the indignant dame. "I dunno ever his name, nor I don't want to. He took hisself off to Ameriky, and now he's in the land of heaven. I never seen him. If I had, I'd a given it to him properly; O, my dear, not blay-guarding him, you know, but just plain language! Where's your seven commandments?"

At last the rain abated. Peeping into the dark garden you could see the fugitive moonlight hung in a million raindrops in the black twigs of all sorts of bushes and trees, while along the cantle of the porch a line of raindrops hung, even and regular, as if they were nailheads made of glass. So all the guests departed, in one long staggering, struggling, giggling and guffawing body, into the village street. The bride and her man stood in the porch, watching, and waving hands. Sophy was momentarily grieving: what a lot of trouble and fuss when you announced that henceforward you were going to sleep with a man because you loved him true! She had said goodbye to her Grandmother Cassandra, to her father and her little sister. She had hung on her mother's breast, sighing an almost intolerable farewell to innocence—never treasured until it is gone, and thenceforward a pretty sorrow cherished more deeply than wilder joys.

Into Harvey's mind, as they stood there at last alone, momentarily stole an image of a bright-haired girl, lovely,

silent, sad, whom he felt he had deeply wronged. And he was sorry. He had escaped the snare, but if there had been no snare he might this night have been sleeping with a different bride. And it would have been just as well. Sophy looked but a girl with her blown hair and wet face. She was wiping her tears on the tiny apron. But she had the breasts of a woman and decoying eyes.

"Sophy, Sophy!" breathed Harvey, wooing her in the darkness.

"It blows and it rains, and it rains and it blows," chattered the crumpled bride, "and I'm all so bescambled I can't tell wet from windy."

"Come, my love," whispered the bridegroom, "come in, to home."

Four or five months later the higgler's affairs had again taken a rude turn. Marriage, alas, was not all it might be; his wife and his mother quarrelled unendingly. Sometimes he sided with the one and sometimes with the other. He could not yet afford to instal his mother in a separate cottage, and therefore even Sophy had to admit that her mother-in-law had a right to be living there with them, the home being hers. Harvey hadn't bought much of it; and though he was welcome to it all now, and it would be exclusively his as soon as she died, still, it was her furniture and you couldn't drive any woman (even your mother) off her own property. Sophy, who wanted a home of her own, was vexed and moody, and antagonistic to her man. Business, too, had gone down sadly of late. He had thrown up the Shag Moor round months ago; he could not bring himself to go there again, and he had not been able to square up the loss by any substantial new connections. On top of it all his horse died. It stumbled on a hill one day and fell, and it couldn't get up, or it wouldn't—at any rate, it didn't. Harvey thrashed it and coaxed it, then he cursed it and kicked it; after that he sent for a veterinary man, and the veterinary man ordered it to be shot. And it was shot. A great blow to Harvey Witlow was that. He had no money to buy another horse. Money was tight with him, very tight; and so he had to hire at fabulous cost a decrepit nag that ate like a good one. It ate—well,

it would have astonished you to see what that creature disposed of, with hay the price it was, and corn gone up to heaven nearly. In fact Harvey found that he couldn't stand the racket much longer, and as he could not possibly buy another it looked very much as if he was in queer street once more, unless he could borrow the money from some friendly person. Of course there were plenty of friendly persons but they had no money, just as there were many persons who had the money but were not what you might call friendly; and so the higgler began to reiterate twenty times a day, and forty times a day, that he was entirely and absolutely damned and done. Things were thus very bad with him, they were at their worst—for he had a wife to keep now, as well as a mother, and a horse that ate like Satan, and worked like a gnat—when it suddenly came into his mind that Mrs. Sadgrove was reputed to have a lot of money, and had no call to be unfriendly to him. He had his grave doubts about the size of her purse, but there could be no harm in trying, so long as you approached her in a right reasonable manner.

For a week or two he held off from this appeal, but the grim spectre of destitution gave him no rest, and so, near the close of a wild March day he took his desperate courage and his cart and the decrepit nag to Shag Moor. Wild it was, though dry, and the wind against them, a vast turmoil of icy air strident and baffling. The nag threw up its head and declined to trot. Evening was but an hour away, the fury of the wind did not retard it, nor the clouds hasten it. Low down the sun was quitting the wrack of storm, exposing a jolly orb of magnifying fire that shone flush under caves and through the casements of cottages, casting a pattern of lattice and tossing boughs upon the interior walls, lovelier than dreamed-of pictures. The heads of mothers and old dames were also imaged there, recognisable in their black shadows; and little children held up their hands between window and wall to make five-fingered shapes upon the golden screen. To drive on the moor then was to drive into blasts more dire. Darkness began to fall, and bitter cold it was. No birds to be seen, neither beast nor man; empty of everything it was except sound and a marvel of

dying light, and Harvey Witlow of Dinnop with a sour old nag driving from end to end of it. At Prattle Corner dusk was already abroad: there was just one shaft of light that broached a sharp-angled stack in the rickyard, an ark of darkness, along whose top the gads and wooden pins and tilted straws were miraculously fringed in the last glare. Hitching his nag to the palings he knocked at the door, and knew in the gloom that it was Mary who opened it and stood peering forth at him.

"Good evening," he said, touching his hat.

"Oh!" the girl uttered a cry. "Higgler! What do you come for?" It was the longest sentence she had ever spoken to him; a sad frightened voice.

"I thought" he began "I'd call—and see Mrs. Sadgrove. I wondered . . ."

"Mother's dead," said the girl. She drew the door further back, as if inviting him, and he entered. The door was shut behind him, and they were alone in darkness, together. The girl was deeply grieving. Trembling, he asked the question: "What is it you tell me, Mary?"

"Mother's dead," repeated the girl, "all day, all day, all day." They were close to each other, but he could not see her. All round the house the wind roved lamentingly, shuddering at doors and windows. "She died in the night. The doctor was to have come, but he has not come all day," Mary whispered; "all day, all day. I don't understand; I have waited for him, and he has not come. She died, she was dead in her bed this morning, and I've been alone all day, all day, and I don't know what is to be done."

"I'll go for the doctor," he said hastily, but she took him by the hand and drew him into the kitchen. There was no candle lit; a fire was burning there, richly glowing embers, that laid a gaunt shadow of the table across a corner of the ceiling. Every dish on the dresser gleamed, the stone floor was rosy, and each smooth curve on the dark settle was shining like ice. Without invitation he sat down.

"No," said the girl, in a tremulous voice, "you must help me." She lit a candle: her face was white as the moon, her lips were sharply red, and her eyes were wild. "Come," she said, and he followed her behind the settle

and up the stairs to a room where there was a disordered bed, and what might be a body lying under the quilt. The higgler stood still staring at the form under the quilt. The girl, too, was still and staring. Wind dashed upon the ivy at the window and hallooed like a grieving multitude. A crumpled gown hid the body's head, but thrust from under it, almost as if to greet him, was her naked lean arm, the palm of the hand lying uppermost. At the foot of the bed was a large washing bowl, with sponge and towels.

"You've been laying her out! Yourself!" exclaimed Witlow. The pale girl set down the candle on a chest of drawers. "Help me now," she said, and moving to the bed she lifted the crumpled gown from off the face of the dead woman, at the same time smoothing the quilt closely up to the body's chin. "I cannot put the gown on, because of her arm, it has gone stiff." She shuddered, and stood holding the gown as if offering it to the man. He lifted that dead naked arm and tried to place it down at the body's side, but it resisted and he let go his hold. The arm swung back to its former outstretched position, as if it still lived and resented that pressure. The girl retreated from the bed with a timorous cry.

"Get me a bandage," he said, "or something we can tear up."

She gave him some pieces of linen.

"I'll finish this for you," he brusquely whispered. "You get along downstairs and take a swig of brandy. Got any brandy?"

She did not move. He put his arm around her and gently urged her to the door.

"Brandy," he repeated, "and light your candles."

He watched her go heavily down the stairs before he shut the door. Returning to the bed he lifted the quilt. The dead body was naked and smelt of soap. Dropping the quilt he lifted the out-stretched arm again, like cold wax to the touch and unpliant as a sturdy sapling, and tried once more to bend it to the body's side. As he did so the bedroom door biew open with a crash. It was only a draught of the wind, and a loose latch—Mary had opened a door downstairs, perhaps—but it awed him, as if some

invisible looker were there resenting his presence. He went and closed the door; the latch had a loose hasp, and tiptoeing nervously back he seized the dreadful arm with a sudden brutal energy, and bent it by thrusting his knee violently into the hollow of the elbow. Hurriedly he slipped the gown over the head and inserted the arm in the sleeve. A strange impulse of modesty stayed him for a moment: should he call the girl and let her complete the robing of the naked body under the quilt? That preposterous pause seemed to add a new anger to the wind, and again the door sprang open. He delayed no longer, but letting it remain open, he uncovered the dead woman. As he lifted the chill body the long outstretched arm moved and tilted like the boom of a sail, but crushing it to its side he bound the limb fast with the strips of linen. So Mrs. Sadgrove was made ready for her coffin. Drawing the quilt back to her neck, with a gush of relief he glanced about the room. It was a very ordinary bedroom, bed, washstand, chest of drawers, chair and two pictures—one of deeply religious import, and the other a little pink print, in a gilded frame, of a bouncing nude nymph recumbent upon a cloud. It was queer: a lot of people, people whom you wouldn't think it of, had that sort of picture in their bedrooms.

Mary was now coming up the stairs again, with a glass half full of liquid. She brought it to him.

"No, you drink it," he urged, and Mary sipped the brandy.

"I've finished—I've finished," he said as he watched her, "she's quite comfortable now."

The girl looked her silent thanks at him, again holding out the glass. "No, sup it yourself," he said; but as she stood in the dim light, regarding him with her strange gaze, and still offering the drink, he took it from her, drained it at a gulp and put the glass upon the chest, beside the candle. "She's quite comfortable now. I'm very grieved, Mary," he said with awkward kindness, "about all this trouble that's come on you."

She was motionless as a wax image, as if she had died in her steps, her hand still extended as when he took the glass from it. So piercing was her gaze that his own drifted

from her face and took in again the objects in the room, the washstand, the candle on the chest, the little pink picture. The wind beat upon the ivy outside the window as if a monstrous whip were lashing its slaves.

"You must notify the registrar," he began again, "but you must see the doctor first."

"I've waited for him all day," Mary whispered, "all day. The nurse will come again soon. She went home to rest in the night." She turned towards the bed. "She has only been ill a week."

"Yes?" he lamely said. "Dear me, it is sudden."

"I must see the doctor," she continued.

"I'll drive you over to him in my gig." He was eager to do that.

"I don't know," said Mary slowly.

"Yes, I'll do that, soon's you're ready. Mary," he fumbled with his speech, "I'm not wanting to pry into your affairs, or anything as don't concern me, but how are you going to get along now? Have you got any relations?"

"No," the girl shook her head. "No."

"That's bad. What was you thinking of doing? How has she left you—things were in a baddish way, weren't they?"

"O no," Mary looked up quickly. "She has left me very well off. I shall go on with the farm; there's the old man and the boy—they've gone to a wedding today; I shall go on with it. She was so thoughtful for me, and I would not care to leave all this, I love it."

"But you can't do it by yourself, alone?"

"No. I'm to get a man to superintend, a working bailiff," she said.

"Oh!" And again they were silent. The girl went to the bed and lifted the covering. She saw the bound arm and then drew the quilt tenderly over the dead face. Witlow picked up his hat and found himself staring again at the pink picture. Mary took the candle preparatory to descending the stairs. Suddenly the higgler turned to her and ventured: "Did you know as she once asked me to marry you?" he blurted.

Her eyes turned from him, but he guessed—he could feel that she *had* known.

"I've often wondered why," he murmured, "why she wanted that."

"She didn't," said the girl.

That gave pause to the man; he felt stupid at once, and roved his fingers in a silly way along the roughened nap of his hat.

"Well, she asked me to," he bluntly protested.

"She knew," Mary's voice was no louder than a sigh, "that you were courting another girl, the one you married."

"But, but," stuttered the honest higgler, "if she knew that why did she want for me to marry you?"

"She didn't," said Mary again; and again, in the pause, he did silly things to his hat. How shy this girl was, how lovely in her modesty and grief!

"I can't make tops or bottoms of it," he said, "but she asked me, as sure as God's my maker."

"I know. It was me, I wanted it."

"You!" he cried, "you wanted to marry me!"

The girl bowed her head, lovely in her grief and modesty: "She was against it, but I made her ask you."

"And I hadn't an idea that you cast a thought on me," he murmured. "I feared it was a sort of trick she was playing on me. I didn't understand, I had no idea that you knew about it even. And so I didn't ever ask you."

"Oh, why not, why not? I was fond of you then," whispered she. "Mother tried to persuade me against it, but I was fond of you—then."

He was in a queer distress and confusion: "Oh, if you'd only tipped me a word, or given me a sort of look," he sighed, "Oh, Mary!"

She said no more but went downstairs. He followed her and immediately fetched the lamps from his gig. As he lit the candles: "How strange," Mary said, "that you should come back just as I most needed help. I am very grateful."

"Mary, I'll drive you to the doctor's now."

She shook her head; she was smiling.

"Then I'll stay till the nurse comes."

"No, you must go. Go at once."

He picked up the two lamps, and turning at the door said: "I'll come again tomorrow." Then the wind rushed into the room: "Goodbye," she cried, shutting the door quickly behind him.

He drove away in deep darkness, the wind howling, his thoughts strange and bitter. He had thrown away a love, a love that was dumb and hid itself. By God, he had thrown away a fortune, too! And he had forgotten all about his real errand until now, forgotten all about the loan! Well, let it go; give it up. He would give up higgling; he would take on some other job; a bailiff, a working bailiff, that was the job as would suit him, a working bailiff. Of course there was Sophy; but still—Sophy!

THE APPEAL¹

By E. M. DELAFIELD

(From *Eve*)

THIS isn't a story. It's an attempt at reconstruction. Given my knowledge of the principals—Mary Jarvis and her mother, Mrs. St. Luth—I think I can do it.

Mary Jarvis was my mother, and Mrs. St. Luth, of course, my grandmother. Thank God, I'm a modern, and can look at them impersonally—judge each on her own merits, as it were.

My mother and my grandmother made scenes as other women make jumpers. It was their form of self-expression. I imagine—although I never knew for certain—that it was my father's inability to maintain himself *à la hauteur* in the perennial melodrama that was my mother's idea of life, that led to my grandmother being invited to live with them.

She came when I, their only child, had barely reached the stage of exchanging my baby frills for first knickerbockers. (I am certain, although I don't remember it, that my mother wept and said she felt that she had lost her baby for ever.)

Already my parents were unhappy together. Mary—I call her so here for convenience, but she would never have tolerated it in reality—Mary, although really affectionate and impressionable, was fundamentally insincere, with herself and with everybody else. She lived entirely on the emotional plane, and when genuine emotions were not forthcoming she faked them by instinct. Her mother, who belonged to the same type, although with more strength of character and far less capacity for affection, had always played up to her. They had their violent disputes and violent reconciliations—neither could have been happy without—but they did respect one another's poses.

But my father never played up.

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He couldn't. Worse still, if he could have done so he wouldn't—on principle.

Again I can't remember, but I can imagine, almost to the point of certainty, short and searing passages between my parents.

"Robert, I want you not to ask me to play the piano tonight." (He so seldom gave her an opening that she had to force them.)

"Off colour?"

"It isn't that. I heard today that Mrs. Thorndyke's child is dead. It—it upset me."

"But you didn't know the child."

"I know Katherine Thorndyke."

"You've met her once or twice, I remember. And didn't we hear that if the poor child had lived it must have been an idiot?"

Probably, at that stage, my mother burst into tears. She'd been heading for that, of course—although she didn't know it consciously. But my father did, and had made her aware that he did in a rather brutal fashion.

That was the way they reacted on one another.

It was better after grandmother came. Curiously enough, my father liked her, although she and Mary had so many of the same characteristics. But I think he regarded her as a sort of lightning conductor.

For Mary herself, however, it was different. Like so many people who manufacture continual unhappiness for themselves, she had a frantic craving for happiness and an irrational conviction that happiness was her due.

She told me herself, long afterwards, that she never had any thought of infidelity towards my father, nor did she ever meet any man who could or would have caused her to break her marriage vows. But—and this she didn't tell me; it's part of the reconstruction—she was constantly obsessed by a vague and romantic expectation of some such encounter. I imagine that she could not believe the world to have been created without a special application to her yearnings.

And then, undoubtedly, the nervous wear and tear that

she imposed upon herself and upon us all, told on her spirits. Her scenes with grandmother, although they may have served as a safety valve, were too frequent. They may also have served to throw into painful contrast her husband's stolid opposition to any form of emotional stimulus.

However that may be, grandmother had formed part of our household for rather less than a year when Mary suddenly ran away.

It was, I suppose, the only dramatic thing that she could think of in a wet and dreary February, and I have no doubt at all that she did it on impulse. That is to say, she gave herself time to write an immensely long letter to my father—in which, perhaps, she set forth that view of herself which he never gave her adequate opportunity for putting into words—but she gave herself no time to pack up her things. She simply took her dressing-case, and I am sure that that was mostly filled with photographs in folding frames, and packets of letters tied up with ribbon, and little manuals of devotion heavily underscored in several places.

Then she walked out of the house and to the station, and eventually got to Assisi. And they traced her there almost at once, partly because she took no pains to cover up her tracks, and partly because my grandmother—who understood the processes of her mind—found a copy of a "Life of St. Francis" on the drawing-room sofa, face downwards, with one page all blistered, as though tears had fallen upon it.

My father, for his part, found the long letter, that no doubt told him how little he had understood a sensitive nature, and possibly to what point their life together had become intolerable.

And this had the strange effect of making him resolve, and declare aloud, that nothing would induce him to try and get her back again. There must have been a stormy scene between him and grandmother, who had all the conventionally moral instincts of her day, and was genuinely shocked and disturbed at her daughter's abrupt and violent casting off of her obvious responsibilities.

"For the child's sake, at least, Robert . . ." she must have repeated many times.

(Neither she nor my mother ever understood the futility of repeating, again and again, words which had already failed of their appeal.)

"A child whose mother can leave him at three years old is better without her."

"It was madness, Robert, but you know she's not a wicked woman—my poor Mary. If you go and bring her back now no one will ever know what has happened, and you can start a new life together and try again."

"It would be useless."

"Don't, don't say that." The tears must have been pouring down her old face by that time. "Oh, Robert, give her another chance. This will have been a lesson to her—won't you forgive her and take her back?"

Well, in the end she prevailed to a certain extent—that is to say, my father would not seek out the culprit himself, but he would allow grandmother to do so, and if she brought Mary home again properly repentant he would not refuse to receive her and give her the "chance" of starting their married life afresh. "For the boy's sake."

My grandmother must have repeated that phrase a hundred times at least, and it was certainly her *pièce de résistance* in the scene at Assisi with Mary.

I've had a version of that scene from each one of them, and, on the whole, the accounts tally, although, of course, each viewed it—as they viewed everything—exclusively from the personal angle.

My mother saw only a young, beautiful, misunderstood woman, goaded to frenzy in the grip of an uncongenial marriage, taking a desperate step in search of freedom. And then, even stronger and more touching in her relinquishment, finding the courage for love of her child, to return to the house of bondage.

And my grandmother, with equal inevitability, saw only a sorrow-worn woman, no longer young (but infinitely interesting), courageously undertaking a solitary journey on a mission that should restore its sanctity to a shattered home. And even as her urgent plea had shaken Robert's defences, so her eloquence, her boundless influence and unfaltering understanding, must prevail with the slighter,

more trivial, personality of her daughter. The achievement of persuading Mary to return to her husband and child was, my grandmother told me, the ultimate justification of her existence in her own eyes.

As a matter of fact, I doubt if she, any more than the rest of us, felt her existence to be in any need of justification whatsoever—but she was addicted to phrases, and this one at least served as an indication to the magnitude of her effort.

For Mary did not capitulate without a struggle. And it is in the details of that struggle that my reconstruction work comes in, for although each of the protagonists has quoted to me whole sentences, and even speeches, of brilliant oratory from herself and inadequate rejoinder from the other, I do not believe either of them. Accuracy, with that type, can never co-exist with emotion—and emotion, real or imaginary, is never absent.

But this, I imagine, is more or less what took place in the sitting-room of the tiny *albergo* at Assisi.

"I've come to fetch you home, my child. You shall never hear one word of reproach—Robert only wants to begin again—a new life."

"Never, mother. It's impossible. I've borne too much. I can't ever go back to it. I must live my own life."

(Probably Mary had been reading *The Doll's House*. People were discovering Ibsen in those days.)

"Mary, it's not five years since you and Robert were married, in the little country church at home, by our dear old Vicar, who held you at the font when I took you, a tiny baby, to be christened."

It may have been at this stage that Mary began to cry. Anyway, I'm certain that my grandmother did. Any allusions, however irrelevant, to little country churches at home, and Mary as a tiny baby, were always apt to bring the tears to her eyes—and I'm sure that neither of them had thought for an instant of steadying their nerves by sitting down to a solid meal. So that tears must have been easier even than usual.

"Robert doesn't understand me—he never will."

"Darling, don't you remember your early days together?"

The little things—little jokes and allusions and happinesses shared together? Does one ever forget?"

"No," Mary sobbed. "But I can't go back to him."

I think that here, if my grandmother gave her a chance, she probably did make one—or part of one—of the speeches that she long afterwards quoted to me.

She was intensely unhappy. Robert did not understand her, and she could not live in an unsympathetic atmosphere. She should go mad. All that she had ever asked of life was peace, beautiful surroundings, and the ideal companion. . . . If she went back to Robert now, after having found courage to make the break, it would be a repetition of the misery that had broken her heart during the past three years.

(The hearts of my mother and grandmother both suffered innumerable breakages throughout their lives, neither of them ever seeming alive to the physiological absurdity of the expression.)

"It's braver to stay away than to go back and try and patch up something that can never be anything but a failure," quavered Mary, with a momentary flash of insight.

But, of course, grandmother couldn't leave it at that. She had the justification of her own existence to think of, for one thing. I am quite sure that a fortuitous street musician, rendering "Santa Lucia" or "Silver Threads Amongst the Gold" in the distance would have broken down Mary's frail barrier of honest thought and have materially assisted my grandmother to her victory. Accessories were so absolutely essential to them both.

But, so far as I know, grandmother had to win on points, as it were, and received no extraneous help in the shape of sentimental appeals from without.

She made her supreme effort.

"For the boy's sake, Mary . . . your little, little boy. Is he to be motherless?"

"Wouldn't Robert let me have him?"

"No, my dear. How could he? I myself—the mother that bore you, Mary—I couldn't think it right that a woman who had deliberately deserted her husband and home should have the care of a little innocent child."

"Oh, my baby!"

She sobbed and cried, but she had not yet capitulated. Grandmother, however, had gauged pretty accurately the force of the baby-*motif*.

"Before I came away, on my long, lonely journey," she said slowly, "I went up to the nursery, to say good-bye to Bobbie. He had on his blue overall—the one you embroidered for him last summer, Mary—was it only last summer?—and he was playing with his engine, on the nursery floor, his dear, round face was so solemn . . ."

"Oh, don't—don't—"

But grandmother, the tears streaming from her eyes, relentlessly continued: "Darling, his big blue eyes looked up at me, and his little voice asked: '*Where's Mummie?*'"

Did grandmother's — even grandmother's — conscience misgive her at the quotation? That it was verbally correct, I have no doubt—but what of the intonation?

My grandmother's poignant rendering of "*Where's Mummie?*" no doubt contained all the pathetic appeal of bewildered and deserted childhood throughout the ages . . .

But mine—the original "*Where's Mummie . . .?*" I have no recollection of it, of course, but I do remember myself at four years old—a stolid, rather cynical, child, utterly independent by temperament, and reacting strongly even then against a perpetually emotional atmosphere. And one knows the way in which small children utter those conventional enquiries which they unconsciously know to be expected of them . . . the soft, impersonal indifference of the tone, the immediate re-absorption, without waiting for a reply, in the engrossing occupation of the moment . . .

Mary held out for a little while longer, but the heart went out of her resistance after the pitiful sound of that "*Where's Mummie?*" as my grandmother rendered it.

She gave in—"for the boy's sake."

And my grandmother had justified her existence.

They travelled home together, and Mary averted an anti-climax by quite a real nervous breakdown, that overtook her after she got home, before my father had had time to forgive her in so many words.

So they began again—literally.

It wasn't, in fact, possible for them to be happy together, and they never were so. I grew up in the midst of scenes, tears, and intermittent periods of reconciliation. There was no stability about my childhood; and no reality. Undoubtedly I was the victim—far more so than my father, who presently sought and found consolation elsewhere, or than Mary, whom he thus provided with a perfectly legitimate grievance that lasted her until he died fifteen years later. After that, she was able gradually to forget that there had ever been unhappiness between them, and to assume the identity of a heartbroken widow.

Mrs. St. Luth, my grandmother, lived to be very old.

"But useless old woman though I am, God gave me the opportunity of justifying my existence when He let me bring a mother home to her little child . . ."

I wonder.

Thank God, I'm a modern.

THE COFFIN¹

By CARADOC EVANS

(From *The Illustrated Review*)

CAPTAIN SHACOB owned "Rhondda," the rowing boat from which he fished and in which he took folk on the sea at Ferryside. A plump widow named Ann, who had sailed in his boat for pleasure, said to him: "My son, Little Ben, is a prentice to the carpenter; be you a father to him. My husband, Big Ben, is in the graveyard; be you my second husband." She also told him that she rented a house and ten acres of fertile land on the bank of Avon Towy.

Shacob sold his boat and married Ann, whose fields he trimmed at what time he was not repairing the ditches on the public roads.

Now Ann fattened wondrously; her flesh almost choking her, she was wont in hot weather to throw up her hands and scream that she was dying. On arising on a July day, she went into a fit and fell back upon her bed. At midday she would not sup of the gingered and sugared bread and water which her husband offered her, nor again in the evening.

"Eat, woman fach," said Shacob.

"Let me perish on an empty belly," answered Ann.

Having milked his cow, tended his two pigs, and shooed his fowls to roost, Shacob walked to the workshop of Lloyd the carpenter. He stood at the threshold of the workshop, his hands, like the claws of a very old crow, grasping the top of the half door, his eyes wearing the solemn aspect of the man who is soon to revel in the mournful joy that Death brings to us Welsh people; his long under-lip curling over his purple-stained chin like the petal of a rose, Shacob

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stood at the door as if he were the reporter of sacred messages in the chapel.

This is what he saw inside the workshop: the crutched figure of the carpenter, whose mouth, from the corners of which dribbled tiny streams of tobacco juice, was like the ungainly cut in a turnip lantern; the hairy face of the cobbler, much of whose wooden leg was thrust into the earth through the shavings and sawdust with which the ground was strewn; the bright countenance of the broken-out preacher, whose skin was of the freshness of that of a sucking pig; the head of Little Ben, whose nose had been twisted at birth, bending over a bird cage.

The preacher was declaring that Jonah was not swallowed by a fish, even though the fish was a whale; whereat the cobbler, driving his leg farther into the earth, cried: "Atheist!"

"Hoit!" said Shacob.

None of the company heard him, so low was his voice.

Presently Little Ben looked up, and after his gaze had rested for a while upon his stepfather's hands, he set to improve the perch rod of his cage.

"Hoity-ho!" Shacob sounded.

"Why do you stand there like a thirsty ox at the gate?" asked the carpenter. "You have seen millions of whales at Ferryside. Sure, indeed, they can take in a man at a gulp."

"Hist-hist," said Shacob. "Ann is going for the sail."

"For two shillings—for one shilling and a morsel of butter," said the preacher, "I'll make a memorial song to the dead."

"Don't let him," cried the cobbler. "Be you warned by me." He struggled to free his leg. "Little Ben, pull her out."

"I am about the coffin," Shacob announced.

"How can I make the coffin," Lloyd replied, "when I am haymaking all the week? Why didn't you come a month back? And Ann is so stout that it will be a longish job."

"Where else can I go?" Shacob wailed.

"That's it!" the carpenter growled. "Take your custom from me. Don't bring your breaks here any more if you

talk like that. Go away with your wheelbarrow and spade and pickaxe and shovel."

"The perished—the stout and the thin—must be housed," the preacher proclaimed.

"Hay must be gathered and stacked and thatched before the corn harvest," Lloyd answered. "How are the animals to live in the winter? Tell me that."

"All the dead—tenors and basses, praying men and men who cry 'Amen,' old and young, big and little—must be housed." So sang the preacher in his pulpit manner.

The cobbler moved before he was freed and fell upon the floor, his wooden leg breaking in two.

"The Big Man's punishment for discussing the Beybile with you," he reproached the preacher. "The breath in your body is the smoke of hell fire."

"I have not the timber to make Ann a coffin," said Lloyd. "No; not for stout Ann."

"There are many trees," said Shacob.

"Great will be the cost of the coffin."

"I'll sell the cow," Shacob began.

"Hearken, if I make the coffin you must pay the day after the funeral. You shall not make a debt of it."

The preacher blessed Lloyd: "You are behaving in a most religious spirit. Houses of stonemasons crumble, but the houses of carpenters will be placed in the lofts of the White Palace."

Husband, stepson, and carpenter then passed through the village and the deeply rutted cart-wide lane to Shacob's house, which is in the midst of marshland.

As they three unlatched their clogs at the foot of the stairway, Shacob shouted: "Ann, here is Lloyd Carpenter. Are you perished?"

Ann made an answer, whereupon they went up to her. Lloyd drew back the bedclothes and bade the woman straighten her limbs; then he measured her length, her breadth, and her depth. "Write you down two inches extra every way for the swellings," he commanded Little Ben.

"We ought to write four," said the youth.

"Clap your head. Have I ever made a coffin too small?"

"If it only fits," said Ben, "how can the angel flap his

wings when he comes to call mammo up? Mammo, you need the angel?"

"Why, iss, son bach," Ann replied. "Are you not ashamed, carpenter, to deprive me of the angel?"

"It is the large cost that is in my think," murmured Lloyd.

"Drat your think! I will not go into a coffin that will smother the angel. Have I not suffered enough?"

"It will be many shillings more. Maybe ten. Maybe fifteen. O iss, a pound."

"Be good," said Shacob. "It is well to obey the perished."

For three days Ben and Lloyd laboured; and as the coffin was carried on the shoulders of four men, the hay-makers who came to the hedges were amazed at its vastness.

By the side of the bed it was put. "For," said Lloyd, "she will be a heavy corpse and easier to roll down than lift."

At the end of the year the carpenter said to Ann's husband: "Give me now the coffin money."

"On the day after the funeral," said Shacob.

"I will have the petty sessions on you, I will, drop dead and blind. I'll poison your well. And your cow. And your pigs. Is it my blame that Ann is alive?"

"It shall be as you pledged. Broken-out preacher heard you."

"Tut-tut. He is a bad man. He disputes the Beybile. That is why he was broken out from the capel."

But Shacob was soon puzzle-headed. Ann fancied to see herself in the coffin, and holding a mirror she tried to enter it, but the breadth of it was too narrow. She made such a great dole that Shacob hurried to discover Lloyd's iniquity.

"Little Ben," he shouted at the door of the workshop, "come forth from the workshop of the sinner. Bring your bird cage and coat and tools. Have a care you bring nothing that is his."

The youth obeyed and remained like a sentry by his stepfather.

"There's glad I am I did not pay you," cried Shacob. "If I had the law would find a thief."

"Be quiet, robber," Lloyd returned.

"Who made Ann's coffin too small? Come out, neighbours bach, and listen. Who made Ann's coffin too small? Who tried to cheat the perished dead?"

Many people came to hear Shacob reviling Lloyd and were very sorry that the carpenter answered in this fashion: "Reit. 'Oreit. Little Ben, go you in and find the paper with the figures."

"And keep it tightly," Shacob counselled his stepson. "Nothing new must be put in it. Don't you be tempted by Lloyd because he was your master. We are honest."

After Lloyd had measured Ann, and while he was measuring the coffin, Little Ben went under his mother's bed and wrote anew on another paper and in accordance with the fresh measurements.

"Carpenter," he said shyly, "you are wrong. Study the figures. I cannot work for a scampist master."

"Why do I want a useless coffin?" Ann shrieked. "A mess I would be in if I perished now. And what would be said if I reached the Palace in a patched coffin? Ach y fy!"

That night Little Ben, who was unable to sleep for his mother's plight, stole into Lloyd's workshop and brought away screws and nails and a few planks of timber; and with these he enlarged the coffin.

In the ten years that followed the trouble between Lloyd and Shacob brewed into bitter hatred; it attracted one to the other, when they fought as fiercely as poachers fight for the possession of a ferret. Shacob died, and there was peace for a little while, but in the afterseason Lloyd did not subdue his rage. "Shacob is gone," he whined. "Cobler Wooden Leg is gone and Broken-out Preacher. The next will be Ann. Oh, there will be a champion riot if I don't get my money." His spoken and unspoken prayer was that the Big Man would allow him to live longer than Ann. Every summer evening he watched the weather signs, and if they foretold heat, he said joyfully to himself: "Like a poof she'll go off tomorrow."

As Ann fattened so Ben enlarged the coffin with iron staples and leathern hinges. This he did many times. The fame of his skill became a byword and folk brought to

him clocks, sewing machines, and whatsoever that wanted much cunning to be set in proper order.

He had married, and his four children were a delight to Ann, who often tumbled into her coffin and closing her eyes said to them: "Like this grandmammo will go to the Palace." The children pranced about with glee, and by and by they played hide and seek in it.

On a day Ben said: "If I stretch the box any more your perished corpse will fall through the bottom, mammo. Even now it will have to be well roped before you are lifted."

Before sunset a horrible thing happened: three children hid in the coffin and the fourth swooped down upon them, and the sides of it fell apart.

Ben viewed this what had been done. "It won't repair," he told his tearful mother. "I'll make you another, mammo fach."

He laughed as he separated the pieces, for those that belonged to Lloyd he was returning to Lloyd.

NIGHT FEARS¹

By LESLIE P. HARTLEY

(From *The Tatler*)

THE coke-brazier was elegant enough, but the night-watchman was not, consciously at any rate, sensitive to beauty of form. No; he valued the brazier primarily for its warmth. He could not make up his mind whether he liked its light. Two days ago, when he first took on the job, he was inclined to suspect the light; it dazzled him, made a target of him, increased his helplessness; it emphasised the darkness. But tonight he was feeling reconciled to it; and aided by its dark, clear rays, he explored his domain—a long, narrow rectangle, fenced off from the road by poles, round and thick as flag-posts, and lashed loosely at the ends. By day they seemed simply an obstacle to be straddled over, but at night they were boundaries, defences almost. At their junctions, where the warning red lanterns dully gleamed, they bristled like a barricade. The night-watchman felt himself in charge of a fortress.

He took a turn up and down, musing. Now that the strangeness of the position had worn off he could think with less effort; the first night he had vaguely wished that the "No Thoroughfare" board had faced him instead of staring uselessly up the street; it would have given his thoughts a rallying point. Now he scarcely noticed its blankness. His thoughts were few, but pleasant to dwell on, and in the solitude they had the intensity of sensations. He arranged them in cycles, the rotation coming at the end of ten paces or so, when he turned to go back over his tracks. He enjoyed the thought that held his mind for the moment, but always with some agreeable impatience for the next. If he surmised there would be a fresh development in it, he would deliberately refrain from calling it up, leave it

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fermenting and ripening, as it were, in a luxury of expectation.

The night-watchman was a domesticated man with a wife and two children, both babies. One was beginning to talk. Since he took on this job wages had risen, and everything at home seemed gilt-edged. It made a difference to his wife. When he got home she would say, as she had done on the preceding mornings, "Well, you do look a wreck. This night-work doesn't suit you, I'm sure." The night-watchman liked being addressed in that way, and hearing his job described as night-work; it showed an easy, competent familiarity in a man's occupation. He would tell her, with an air of one who had seen much, about the incidents of vigil, and what he hadn't seen he would invent, just for the pleasure of hearing her say: "Well, I never! You do have some experiences, and no mistake."

He was very fond of his wife. Why, hadn't she promised to patch up the old blue paper blinds, used once for the air-raids, but somewhat out of repair as a consequence of their being employed as a quarry for paper to wrap up parcels? He hadn't slept well, couldn't get accustomed to sleeping by day, the room was so light; but these blinds would be just the thing, and it would be nice to see them, and feel that the war was over and there was no need for them really.

The night-watchman yawned as, for the twentieth time, perhaps, he came up sharp against the boundary of his walk. Loss of sleep perhaps. He would sit in his shelter and rest a bit. As he turned and saw the narrowing gleams that transformed the separating poles into thin lines of fire, he noticed that nearly at the end, just opposite the brazier in fact and only a foot or two from his hut, the left line was broken. Someone was sitting on the barrier, his back turned on the night-watchman's little compound. "Strange I never heard him come," thought the man, brought back with a jerk from his world of thoughts to the real world of darkness and the deserted street—well, no, not exactly deserted, for here was someone who might be inclined to talk for half an hour or so. The stranger paid no attention to the watchman's slow advancing tread. A little disconcerting.

He stopped. "Drunk, I expect," he thought. This would be a real adventure to tell his wife. "I told him I wasn't going to stand any rot from him. 'Now, my fine fellow, you go home to bed; that's the best place for you,' I said." He had heard drunk men addressed in that way, and wondered doubtfully whether he would be able to catch the tone; it was more important than the words, he reflected. At last, pulling himself together, he walked up to the brazier and coughed loudly, and feeling ill at ease set about warming his hands with such energy he nearly burned them.

As the stranger took no notice, but continued to sit wrapped in thought, the night-watchman hazarded a remark to his bent back. "A fine night," he said rather loudly, though it was ridiculous to raise one's voice in an empty street. The stranger did not turn round.

"Yes," he replied, "but cold; it will be colder before morning." The night-watchman looked at his brazier, and it struck him that the coke was not lasting so well as on the previous nights. "I'll put some more on," he thought, picking up a shovel; but instead of the little heap he had expected to see, there was nothing but dust and a few bits of grit—his night's supply had been somehow overlooked. "Won't you turn round and warm your hands?" he said to the person sitting on the barrier. "The fire isn't very good, but I can't make it up, for they forgot to give me any extra, unless somebody pinched it when my back was turned." The night-watchman was talking for effect; he did not really believe anyone had taken the coke. The stranger might have made a movement somewhere about the shoulders.

"Thank you," he said, "but I prefer to warm my back." "Funny idea that," thought the watchman.

"Have you noticed," proceeded the stranger, "how easily men forget? This coke of yours, I mean; it looks as if they didn't care about you very much, leaving you in the cold like this." It had certainly grown colder, but the man replied cheerfully: "Oh, it wasn't that. They forgot it. Hurrying to get home, you know." "Still, they might have remembered," he thought. "It was Bill Jackson's turn to fetch it—Old Bill, as the fellows call him. He doesn't like

me very much. The chaps are a bit stand-offish. They'll be all right when I know them better."

His visitor had not stirred. "How I would like to push him off," the night-watchman thought, irritated and somehow troubled. The stranger's voice broke in upon his reflections.

"Do you like this job?"

"Oh, not so bad," said the man carelessly; "good money, you know."

"Good money!" repeated the stranger scornfully. "How much do you get?"

The night-watchman named the sum.

"Are you married, and have you got any children?" the stranger persisted.

The night-watchman said "Yes," without enthusiasm.

"Well, that won't go very far when the children are a bit older," declared the stranger. "Have you any prospect of a rise?" The man said no, he had just had one.

"Prices going up, too," the stranger commented.

A change came over the night-watchman's outlook. The feeling of hostility and unrest increased. He couldn't deny all this. He longed to say, "What do you think you're getting at?" and rehearsed the phrase under his breath, but couldn't get himself to utter it aloud; his visitor had created his present state of mind, and was lord of it. Another picture floated before him, less rosy than the first; an existence drab-coloured with the dust of conflict, but relieved by the faithful support of his wife and children at home. "After all, that's the life for a man," he thought; but he did not cherish the idea, did not walk up and down hugging it as he cherished and hugged the other.

"Do you find it easy to sleep in the daytime?" asked the stranger presently.

"Not very," the night-watchman admitted.

"Ah!" said the stranger; "dreadful thing, insomnia."

"When you can't go to sleep, you mean," interpreted the night-watchman, not without a secret pride.

"Yes," came the answer. "Makes a man ill, mad sometimes. People have done themselves in sooner than stand the torture."

It was on the tip of the night-watchman's tongue to mention that panacea, the blue blinds. But he thought it would sound foolish, and wondered whether they would prove such a sovereign remedy after all.

"What about your children? You won't see much of them," remarked the stranger, "while you are on this job. Why, they'll grow up without knowing you! Up when their papa's in bed, and in bed when he's up. Not that you miss them much, I daresay. Still, if children don't get fond of their father while they're young, they never will."

Why didn't the night-watchman take him up warmly, assuring him they were splendid kids; the eldest called him daddy, and the younger, his wife declared, already recognised him? She knew by its smile, she said. He couldn't have forgotten all that; half an hour ago it had been one of his chief thoughts. He was silent.

"I should try and find another job if I were you," observed the stranger. "Otherwise you won't be able to make both ends meet. What will your wife say then?" The man considered; at least he thought he was facing the question, but his mind was somehow too deeply disturbed, and circled wearily and blindly in its misery. "I was never brought up to a trade," he said hesitatingly; "father's fault." It struck him that he had never confessed that before; had sworn not to give his father away. "What am I coming to?" he thought. Then he made an effort. "My wife's all right, she'll stick to me." He waited, positively dreading the stranger's next attack. Though the fire was burning low, almost obscured under the coke ashes that always seem more lifeless than any others, he felt drops of perspiration on his forehead, and his clothes, he knew, were soaked. "I shall get a chill, that'll be the next thing," he thought; but it was involuntary; such an idea hadn't occurred to him since he was a child, supposedly delicate.

"Yes, your wife," said the stranger at last, in tones so cold and clear that they seemed to fill the universe; to admit of no contradiction; to be graven with a fine unerring instrument out of the hard rock of Truth itself. "You won't see much of her either. You leave her pretty much to herself, don't you? Now with these women, you know,

that's a *risk*." The last word rang like a challenge; but the night-watchman had taken the offensive, shot his one little bolt, and the effort had left him more helpless than ever.

"When the eye doth not see," continued the stranger, "the heart doth not grieve; on the contrary, it makes merry." He laughed, as the night-watchman could see from the movement of his shoulders. "I've known cases very similar to yours. When the cat's away, you know! It's a pity you're under contract to finish this job" (the night-watchman had not mentioned a contract), "but as you are, take my advice and get a friend to keep an eye on your house. Of course, he won't be able to stay the night—of course not; but tell him to keep his eyes open."

The stranger seemed to have said his say, his head drooped a little more; he might even be dropping off to sleep. Apparently he did not feel the cold. But the night-watchman was breathing hard and could scarcely stand. He tottered a little down his territory, wondering absurdly why the place looked so tidy; but what a travesty of his former progress. And what a confusion in his thoughts, and what a thumping in his temples.

Slowly from the writhing, tearing mass in his mind a resolve shaped itself; like a cuckoo, it displaced all others. He loosened the red handkerchief that was knotted round his neck without remembering whose fingers had tied it a few hours before, or that it had been promoted (not without washing) to the status of a garment from the menial function of carrying his lunch. It had been an extravagance, that tin carrier, much debated over, and justified finally by the rise in the night-watchman's wages. He let the handkerchief drop as he fumbled for the knife in his pocket, but the blade, which was stiff, he got out with little difficulty. Wondering vaguely if he would be able to do it, whether the right movement would come to him, why he hadn't practised it, he took a step towards the brazier. . . . It was the one friendly object in the street. . . .

Later in the night the stranger, without putting his hands on the pole to steady himself, turned round for the first time and regarded the body of the night-watchman. He

even stepped over into the little compound and, remembering perhaps the dead man's invitation, stretched out his hands over the still warm ashes in the brazier. Then he climbed back and, crossing the street, entered a blind alley opposite, leaving a track of dark, irregular footprints; and since he did not return it is probable that he lived there.

THE OLD STORY¹

By JANKO LAVRIN

(From *The New Age*)

"THE incident took place under trivial circumstances," said my friend, as he lit his after-dinner cigar. "It began in a shabby railway carriage between Genoa and Rome. You know what Italian trains are like. Add to their usual inconveniences the stifling air of a damp summer night, a crowd of perspiring passengers, jostling each other in the *coupés* and corridors, and you will have some idea of the discomfort of that particular journey of mine. It was thanks only to the energy of a casual fellow-traveller—a Rumanian, I think—that I had succeeded in getting a seat. I can still see his swarthy face with its cunning, 'Balkanic' eyes and magnificent Roman profile, often marred by a smile which was a strange combination of expansiveness, childish naïveté and half-conscious cynicism.

"I am not in the habit of picking up promiscuous acquaintances, but his youthful nonchalance overcame my reserve, and soon after leaving Genoa we were on fairly good terms. We had not gone far, however, before I detected in his spontaneity a kind of plebian uncereemoniousness and that lack of breeding which sometimes divides men more than wealth or rank; so I quietly ceased the conversation.

"Overwhelmed with fatigue, I had begun to doze when a sudden stir aroused me. The train had reached Pisa, and the disturbance was caused by the entry of a fresh passenger—a woman; no, loveliness itself. Can you imagine a Madonna of Perugino sitting in a dusty railway carriage with her baby in her arms? Anyhow, this is what I saw in front of me. The same soft and soothing beauty, the same touch of dreaminess and melancholy mother-

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happiness, especially noticeable as she bent her smiling oval face towards her child.

"You probably know from your own experience that some beautiful women carry with them a certain atmosphere of vague mystery, a mystery which—well, it is like a vibration of some irrational force which touches a man's soul and floods it with a higher vitality. Many years have passed since then; but I still think that that woman was the only one who ever struck me as a kind of predestined complement which could arouse all the sleeping potencies of my real self. But I won't philosophise.

"It was the enterprising young Rumanian who had managed to secure her a place in our *coupé*. I was so grateful to him for this feat that I immediately renewed our broken conversation. But here a shining bald pate appeared in the corridor, and a pair of goggle-eyes peeped through the crowd. A curious little head, this, with a reddish goatee beard and the air of a good-natured satyr who has been converted into a devoted, even sentimental husband. The beard wagged several times towards the sitting Madonna; and when she smiled at its owner, asking him to find himself a seat, he answered with nervous haste:

"'I am happy, quite happy here in the corridor, *cara mia*. I don't miss anything as long as you and the *carissimo bambino* are comfortable in this sardine-box. *Si, si—* sardine-box, ha-ha-ha.' And the peeping head withdrew with a happy grimace.

"The train panted monotonously across a silent, starlit plain. My drowsy eyes were riveted, even against my will, on the Madonna *vis-à-vis*. And as I looked at her a great sorrow came over me: I felt as if all my life I had been seeking that very woman, with her unearthly face and smile; and now when at last I had found her, she was the property of another man. That ridiculous goggle-eyed thief had stolen her from me for ever. And why? Why? In such melancholy brooding I succumbed again to my fatigue. The last picture that flashed before my eyes was the Madonna bending over her crying child, and the Rumanian helping her to soothe it, meanwhile exchanging with her a few phrases in bad Italian.

"I dozed and slept, and my sleep was full of confused dreams. In one of them I seemed to be walking behind that very woman through a desert parched with the sun. The brazen space blinded my eyes, the hot sand wounded my feet so that they bled. All at once I saw a creeping stream of smoke on the horizon, while a noise like the roar of animals broke the silence. The woman directed her steps towards the smoke. As we approached a damped and dying fire I saw three figures crouching round it. They were three hairy gorillas. One was entirely naked, another wore trousers, and the third spectacles. When they caught sight of her they jumped up. With roars and laughter they began to dance first round the smoky fire, then round her. The dance quickened. It grew faster and faster, until it became a chaotic whirl through which I heard her cries, mixed with the lusty grunts of the gorillas. Gathering together all my strength, I was just going to her rescue when I stopped in awe: I noticed that the fire and the dancing gorillas were on the edge of the world—the brown desert ended there with an abrupt, bottomless precipice. I wanted to shout, to warn them, but another horror seized me: the woman's face was changed now and unfamiliar. With a chuckle she clasped the neck of the bespeckled gorilla and danced with him in a wild frenzy. I became dizzy, my legs gave way; headlong I plunged over the precipice—and awoke to find the Rumanian shaking me: "Get up! We are at Rome."

"Wonderingly, I looked round. Here my eyes fell on her, and all the unpleasant sensations of the dream dissolved like a shadow.

"The train stopped. In the buzz and rush of passengers, shouting ciceroni, porters and hotel-agents, I saw her press the hand of my companion and disappear with her husband, whose eyes were now red-rimmed and blinking after a sleepless night. When she had gone, something of my innermost self seemed to have vanished, too. I forgot everything about luggage, tips and hotels, leaving all these things to the practical Rumanian, who took me to a crowded hotel. After having washed and changed I went out and walked through the streets in a kind of waking

dream: a dim hope of a chance meeting with her gradually gaining strength until it became an obsession.

"I don't know exactly how long I walked like this. It must have been very long. When I at last got back to the hotel I met the Rumanian, who had just come downstairs after a sound sleep, and exchanged a few words with him. Remembering that he had managed to make her acquaintance in the train, I suddenly felt an irresistible desire to talk to him. We sat down on the terrace of the hotel and I began a casual conversation about the heat in Rome and precautions against malaria. Then, as if by chance, I mentioned something about our fair fellow-passenger. But soon I found myself speaking with a kind of nervous *élan*. I talked and talked to my companion, whose childishly curved lips assumed a mocking expression, mingled with a slight but extremely unpleasant air of superiority—as if he took me for a sentimental fool. Irritated by this, and also by the fact that I had begun to discuss such intimate matters with a stranger, I was just thinking of leaving him, when the Rumanian suddenly burst into a peal of laughter.

"'What are you laughing at?' I asked, feeling that my position was becoming more and more ridiculous.

"'Ha-ha-ha! Are you really in love with her? I bet you are. Please do not be alarmed. As a matter of fact, she is not staying far from us. Would you perhaps like to meet her again?'

"'Of course I would, if—if you are not joking,' I answered, looking at him rather doubtfully.

"'Then try to be more composed and do sit here for another ten minutes. I gave her the address of my hotel. She was kind enough to say she would elude the vigilance of her husband for an hour or so this afternoon.'

"I looked at him with intentional scorn; but this was merely the pretext for more laughter, followed by a further explanation in the same boyish and boasting manner:

"'You see, I am an old sinner, and that's the end of it. I simply cannot pass by a pretty woman without experimenting on her. It is one of my weaknesses, ha-ha-ha! . . . And that travelling Beatrice was too pretty to be neglected. So while you were sleeping I was acting. Our fingers met

first by chance, as it were—over her child, as I helped her to quiet it. After that the usual tricks began, and—*ma foi!*—I can boast of a complete success. At half-past three she is coming to see me. In two days she is leaving for Paraguay where her bald husband has just obtained some diplomatic post—so there is no time to be wasted, he-he-he! . . . I can introduce her to you. Would you like to? *Tiens!* There she comes. What a figure, eh? . . . I hope you will excuse me if I leave you now. I shall see you again at supper. *Au revoir!*

"He ran to meet a woman whom I recognised at once, although I tried with all my strength not to believe my eyes. Could it not be a double? No, mistake was impossible! It was the same innocent dreamy face—the face of a Madonna by Perugino. As she passed by (without even noticing me) on her way to my fellow-traveller's room, she looked like the very embodiment of what sentimental poets would style the Eternally Womanly.

"For a few minutes I stood numbed. Then the three gorillas dancing in the smoke on the edge of the world flashed so vividly before my eyes that I was dizzy again: again I had the sensation of falling into endless emptiness. But I came to myself and began to laugh—loudly and genuinely. Only I should not like to laugh like that a second time in my life: there are kinds of laughter which cost very dear—too dear, in fact, too dear."

DECKERS ON THE COAST¹

By WILLIAM McFEE

(From *The Illustrated London News* and *The Atlantic Monthly*)

I

DOWN on the after-deck, shielded from sun and rain and the idle stare of the promenade, they were spread in a sprawling heap on Number Three hatch. Sixty, counting the children, as the ship left Colon. Nine hours later, what with the motion of the vessel and money troubles, the great negress in the purple kimono set up a roaring, and she was got out of the crowd somehow; and then there were sixty-one.

In that congested microcosm, however, this was no more than an ephemeral inconvenience. It was more or less perplexing to a spectator how so many of them, with their diversities of sleeping paraphernalia, had contrived to embed themselves in a species of human mosaic, upon a thirty by twenty-five hatch. Nevertheless, it was not adequate. They overflowed on all four sides, spilling from camp-bedsteads set solidly athwart the gangways, snoring on bags of dunnage draped upon the winches (which were still hot, and caused occasional squeals as some small darky clutched the pipes and cylinders), and dispersing upon the bulwarks, where several were holding secret communication with the heaving waters.

As it grew dark, a huge wired bowl was suddenly turned on, and the assembled voyagers were flooded with yellow rays. It was easy to see that some of these people were accustomed to this method of traveling and had grown expert in dealing with the minor problems of existence in such circumstances. There was a girl, for instance, on the port side, who had brought her own narrow iron bed,

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with sheets, and who revealed the skill of a quick-change artist in divesting herself of her shore finery and appearing, as if by magic, in a scarlet peignoir, her hair cascading over brown shoulders, and between her lips a cigarette offered by an appreciative saloon-waiter, who, with one eye cocked to watch the long port alley for the second steward's approach, was laying the foundations of, let us hope, an enduring friendship.

There was the aged negro, so grizzled that he seemed incredible and out of place save in an advertisement, who sat on a basket suitcase on the deck and read slowly, and with devastating enunciation, from the Old Testament.

There was the perennial and solitary vagabond, in dire need of a shave, his feet thrust into soiled rope-soled canvas shoes, his head bound in a calico underskirt borrowed from a neighbor, already sound asleep.

Others were less easy. Again and again they rose from their chairs and beds, and settled themselves in supposedly more comfortable attitudes. A mother, with her three, all on one strip of canvas and laid out as if for interment, was periodically aroused by her offspring in monotonous rotation. Fed, their dark little faces still moist from the suckling, they fell back and slept instantly, lying in utter and innocent nakedness like statues of polished chalcedony. A couple, man and woman, perplexing enough to the European unversed in the life of the Coast, fondled one another and chuckled at intervals at their own whispered remarks. Perplexing, since he was a heavy blond young man with a silky beard concealing a weak chin, while she was a vigorous and beautiful quadroon, the wedding ring conspicuous on her finger as she lolled in her chair, alert, intelligent, bright as a new penny when she leveled her gaze upon an appraising saloon-waiter or scullion who meditated an advance. Less easy, these, since they were just married, and the future in Calomar, whither he was bound as a clerk, was uncertain.

Beyond them, and engaged in rapid converse with some of the crew, stood a man of uncertain age. His cap was of some furry fabric spotted to resemble the skin of a leopard, and his soiled linen suit hung loosely upon him. His face

was drawn into vertical lines, into harsh furrows, and the expression of his irascible and bloodshot eyes was that of a man engaged in secret warfare with Fate. At times he turned, and the light from the cargo-cluster illumined that ravaged countenance with dreadful fidelity. There was an air of excitement about him, too, since he talked with the rapidity and gestures of one who lacked time to complete his story; and he looked around into the glare of the light as if he saw someone in the distance, overtaking him.

And he had competitors: from the recumbent forms arose a murmurous cacophony of diverse organs. Children whimpered and squalled; four Negroes snarled and gabbled as they shot craps; a piratical creature strummed on a banjo and hummed; while on the starboard side, a furious uproar raged around a gray-haired virago, fit model for the Eumenides herself, who was accusing a smiling youth of stealing a bottle of eau-de-cologne from her bag. This was the most popular show of the evening. The dame sat there on her bed, her chemise sliding from her incredible shoulders, her bony arms and jaws moving in a convulsive synchronism. Men stood over her, with folded arms, and watched every movement, as if she were some monotonous automaton they had wound up and set going. This impression, that she was not human, but a clockwork affair, gained force when, of a sudden, without warning, as she foamed and choked, and lunged toward her adversary to strike him down to death, some word spoken amid the din made her stop and, collapsing upon her pallet, she shrieked with laughter. She seemed to have run down, her spring broken, her interior mechanism gone derelict.

But the man on the other side of the hatch took no notice of these distractions. He was driven by something more than a mere momentary gust of animal passion. His incessant watchfulness, as he turned his head again and again toward the light, reminded one of a wild animal devouring his prey in an alien jungle. Like a wild animal, too, he took no notice of the snapping jackals near him, or of the natural noises—the booming of the wind now rising, the rattle and flap of the awning, the sough and spit of the sea along the side. He held the three men in white jackets

in subjection to his vibrating finger and swift impetuous speech. They made no sign, save to spit and flick ash from cigarettes, but they remained. Here was necromancy, since they knew the steward was already searching angrily for them. They remained. The dinner-gong thrummed musically along the corridors as the bell-hop moved to and fro. They remained. The figure of the second steward, spick and span, shaven to pink perfection, emerged smartly from the port alley. They saw him and moved, yet dominated by the cadaverous being in his dirty linen suit, who was offering them, so to speak, the kingdoms of the world. And then the steward saw them, and they rushed into the starboard alley toward the kitchen, leaving the necromancer to sink down on a yellow leatherette suitcase and fumble in his pocket for a cigarette.

All his life he had been an imaginative man. There had come to him, with the romantic tales of childhood, a shameful yet alluring conviction that he would be able to know those desperate doings in reality, be able to rip away the baffling veils hung between himself and the things he desired. There was a dark significance in the way he sat there, his chin on his clenched hands, recalling the vivid moments of his life. He surveyed with stoical courage his boyhood dreams, which were always of material import—dreams of gold and silver, or slaves, and houses of barbaric solidity. What he wanted had always to die, and when it was dead he no longer wanted it. So, as he grew older, he thought more and more of wealth, hard minted bullion, never finding that mysterious idealism which is the key to the riches of the world. Now, on the eve of success, he was poor.

He looked back. The soilure of the deck at which he stared through his unwashed fingers became transmuted into a dark mirror, in which he saw his life in a series of episodes. Yet were they episodes? Were they not rather a series of sudden irretrievable crashes to lower levels of industrious resignation? For he had been industrious. He had been a clever boy at school, and the scholarship which had sent him to the University was easy to him. Yet it was the first stage in his unlucky career. He saw that now. It had

started him up the rickety ladder of learning. While his real self, his imagination, was concerned with the things you could get hold of, money and its transmutations. That was the first drop, when he found himself a bookmaker's clerk at Newmarket, instead of student in cap and gown at Cambridge, a dozen miles away. He had not regretted the change at the time; he had defiantly enjoyed it, and it might have been his career. But the favorites won day after day, and he had been forced to beg a ride to London.

He recalled all the succeeding years, and saw no flaw in himself. Bad luck. He had asked no more than some of the wealth in the world, yet people got the habit of regarding him with contempt and disdain, as if he suffered from some moral lesion. And he was sometimes a little bitter with the gentry who preached that a man, to succeed, should concentrate upon his ambition. Had he not done just that? Yet he had failed very badly indeed.

And it came to him, as he sat on his poor and inadequate valise, staring at the deck, that his struggle had been very much with simple circumstances, and not with people. Neither he nor they had been evil. And also there was this fatal gift of his, of talking with terrible facility. Why was that? Always he had suffered from it. Give him a listener, and he was "away to the races," as they used to say at home. Even when he had got a business position, this gift of tongues, as one might say, was no asset. Once, when he had been admitted to an interview, and he was tearing along, thinking that he was doing finely, his client had shot half out of his chair thundering, "*Shut up!*" There had been a silence, a moment of paralysis, and then a mutter from the man: "What d'you think you're doing?—Drive a man crazy," and such-like comments.

Why was that? Never got anywhere, in spite of his education and fecundity of speech. Even this evening, when he confronted the ship's doctor in the surgery, and was identified on the list of deck-passengers, he had somehow launched into an uncalled-for loquacity, and had found the man, his eyeglass screwed into his experienced blue eye, examining him critically. And had there not been a faint sound like "*cacoëthes loquendi*" as he went out? The

doctor thought himself safe, no doubt, in talking Latin to a decker. But had he really gabbler's itch?

He stared at the deck and wondered. Even as he did so, he found his lips forming the words that he had "no animus, no animus whatever." There it was—*cacoëthes loquendi*—gabbler's itch. He frowned. It was a grave disadvantage, this lack of animus. Because a simple fellow had no consideration in the world, if he talked. They shouted, "Shut up!" or just stared and moved out of earshot. His wife, for example, had simply cleared out, left him for good. Of course he had failed to support her. Ah! but there was another side to that. He had never been successful with women. Nobody could hold it against him that he had done them any harm. It was true that he ought to have supported his wife. But he had a humorous conviction that she would have gone—anyway. Saw it in her eye, one day, while he was talking very fast.

There was something about him, he was well aware. He made a momentary comparison of himself with that doctor, for instance, with his finely wrinkled yet healthy-looking parchment skin, his alert poise, his superior, monocled scrutiny. About the same age. Thirty years ago they might have been contemporaries at the same college. And he, the doctor, had never said a word beyond "What's your name?" and that valedictory mutter in Latin. Was that the difference? No. Something else, he felt quite sure.

He was apparently unaware of the turmoil surrounding him, the buzz and chatter that arise always from a huddled mass of humans, who are being carried, like cattle, to their desired havens, and who become garrulous and musical and quarrelsome, merely for lack of responsibility and employment. He did not notice how, in the course of ceaseless rearrangements of baggage and persons, he had become isolated. He sat now on his valise, on the deck, a solitary being, apart. The deck was now like a large chamber walled in by the wind. Above the great bowl of light which poured its rays diagonally upon them and threw immense black shadows into the after-gloom, the canvas awning seemed to be struggling to escape. It bellied out from the halcyards in a concave vault of quivering fabric, and then

suddenly descended and began to flap viciously in the gusts that came over the bulwarks at intervals. Beyond those bulwarks was darkness and heaving waters, and a wind that gave out great booming sighs as it fled over the sea.

He looked up at last, and found himself as if shunned. And his undisciplined imagination took it as an omen when a wave suddenly reared up over the bulwarks and fled aft, splashing him contemptuously with spray. Nobody touched but him! He shook the water from his eyes and stood up, glancing round to discover the witnesses of his misfortune. But the occupants of the hatch were preoccupied with the problem of existence. The eddying wind and the beating canvas were giving trouble. Children were crying, and the mothers, reared up from their beds, were looking about for more secluded quarters. Several had already moved stealthily aft, and were lost among the crew.

The ship took a long careening roll, and the sea leapt out of the darkness, sparkled and gleamed in the light, and detonated upon the deck. Murmurs and cries mingled with the sough of the water through the scuppers. The forms of men, safe in the shelter of the alleys, were silhouetted against the far brightness of the kitchens, whence had come great crashes of falling metal. Above the straining canvas, the guy-ropes hummed and tackle squeaked as it was flung about by the wind and the scend of the ship. As she drew out from the horns of the Dark Gulf, she began to wallow on the outer edge of a hurricane.

Yet the fact that no one had seen his discomfiture with that first wave was for him a source of satisfaction. His mind ran swiftly over the situation, as he edged in between two massive bollards under the lee of the bulkhead. He saw one of those to whom he had been confiding his plans peering out upon the deck as if looking for him, and wearing an expression of hard curiosity.

II

He drew back. He must think. His trouble was, of course, money. Money for an adequate boat and tackle. But for that he would not have mentioned a word to these

supercilious beings who would be in Sovranilla for a few hours, and then gone, to Curaçoa, to Port-au-Prince, to Havana and New York. No! Much rather would he have depended upon the people he knew in Sovranilla. Perhaps it would have been better if he had never left it. And he would never have heard that conversation, carried on in growls behind the lattice-work where he sat smoking a cigarette after he had washed the dishes for Jovita's Chinese cook.

Jovita was the proprietress of the Love Nest Café for Officers, in a discreet back-street in Colon. The café was upstairs over the street, and was screened all round with romantic greenery, trellised over painted lattice. Jovita's two daughters, as big as herself, were the sirens. They danced and looked ponderously languorous at young ensigns from Indiana and Ohio. But the growls came from maturer throats. Captains of ships, he reflected, smoking cautiously, and lowering his ear until it was on a level with the voices. The lattice-work had creaked as the owner of the growl leaned against it. Outside the Love Nest in the arcaded street, the tropical rain was descending in wavering sheets. It poured like a momentary cataract over the corrugated iron roof of the kitchen. So the captains of ships replenished their glasses and growled on.

The word Sovranilla came out. One of the speakers grumbled that "they could do what they liked with it, once they got it to Sovranilla." And then "six hundred thousand dollars. Gold, in little barrels a strong boy could run off with!" The speaker became indignant. "And nowhere to put it but a cupboard on the boat-deck, with a rotten old ship's-lock on it. Of course,"—here the growl became very thick, and almost inaudible,—"nobody knowing it, just as safe, eh?" And, "What the eye don't see the heart don't grieve for"; and a reference to the "worries of life," followed by guttural laughter and contralto badinage from a daughter of Jovita.

The watcher looked critically at her through a crevice in the heavy foliage. That was not his weakness. It exasperated him at times, that men should abandon realities for such ephemeral solace as women afforded. Yet they had

their uses, he reflected. They were kind enough. At Sovranilla, when he was so utterly on the beach that he had but one pair of pants, a brown-skinned creature, with soft black eyes and gentle voice, had sewn industriously on his behalf. He had bought her a bottle of perfume when he won eleven dollars on the Commandant's bird at the village cockpit. But for the idolater of tangible riches, there was no lure in feminine softness. Indeed, he had this much feminine about him,—and it may be some explanation,—that he loved the things they loved: the glitter of gems, the seductive feel of amber and ivory, the smooth caresses of silk, and the satisfying solidity of coins. He experienced a sensation almost of vertigo as he imagined those "little barrels a strong boy could run off with." The cigarette burned his fingers sharply, as he crouched with closed eyes by the lattice-work, listening to the syncopations of the phonograph.

And they were up there now, a hundred feet away from him, those little barrels. He snuggled down between the bollards and tried to visualize them—clean solid little affairs, with fat scarlet seals, exquisitely portable even for "a strong boy." But with a mysterious lack of logic his mind would not be preoccupied with them. He discovered that his vividly imagined fortitude was undermined by a desire to return to Sovranilla. Do what he would, he could not evade a secret conviction that he regretted his departure. Why had he left?

He drew hard on a cigarette as he recalled that unkempt coast town that sprawled along the crumbling edge of a shabby bluff. He liked it. There was no appearance to keep up. The streets were lanes of mud or dust, with steep gullies cut here and there athwart them; and pigs and fowls wandered in and out of the houses. He liked it. They were kind to him. Always, when he had been in low water, there was a meal somewhere for him. He could always get a canoe and paddle round to a sheltered cove, for an afternoon's swimming. And the brown-skinned girl liked him, for she would always iron a shirt when he asked her.

And he had left it all suddenly, without a word of good-

bye, because of his fatal facility of speech. There was no doubt that, once started, he could not stop. He told that passenger an astounding tale as he walked up the long jetty carrying the gentleman's valise. And what he realized now, as he sat with his back to the vibrating bulkhead and watched the white water spring upon the bulwarks was that, "when he got going," he was not himself, but the person he imagined he was—that alert and efficient image in the rear of his brain! He would have to carry that other magniloquent self upon his back all his days, suffering for the follies of one who seemed to be a fantastic and irresponsible kinsman.

Carrying the gentleman's valise, and carried away himself upon a swift gust of speech, he was aware suddenly that he had been presented with a decker's ticket to Colon. He had shown conclusively and exhaustively that, if he could only get away from Sovranilla, he could regain his position in life. He had invited a college man to consider the agony of spirit another college man suffered in that shaggy dump beside the emerald-green combers of the Caribbean. He saw himself, as he talked, flung down in uttermost misery behind some convenient wattled hut. He saw life unfolding for him amid the glare and rattle of the night-life in Colon, wealth coming to him in heaps of paper and metal, followed by the respect of his contemporaries. So it had befallen, and he had walked out of the great docks, his own small satchel in his hand, his head high, until he was out of sight. Then he knew he was better off, far better off, in that little town of Sovranilla.

And as he thought it out now from his refuge behind the bollards, he saw himself as the owner of a secret which would make them all rich. He imagined himself walking about among them, able at a word to turn the whole place upside down. But he would never speak it. He saw himself again when he came to die, handing on the secret of the money he had cast into the sea at such and such a place, giving the bearings of the lighthouse and the buoy on the sunken wreck. He even saw in imagination the stir that would arise in Juan Pierella's botega when the news went round. Game cocks and roulette wheels would be

forgotten while they discussed it in whispers. Little barrels!

And then, seeing those white-coated men by the door, their glances falling at times in hard curiosity upon him, hiding there between the bollards, he made a determined gesture and turned his mind resolutely from these fancies. And this resolution of his, like a grapnel, caught upon the first thing convenient in his mind. He would have nothing to do with these people on the ship. They had scarcely concealed their amusement while he had sounded them as to their willingness to go into a venture that might be a good thing. He ought to know by now that these people had no ideas above smuggling drugs or egret feathers in their underwear, or perhaps pilfering trinkets from a passenger's trunks. He hated them, when they came ashore in Sovranilla. On one occasion he had risen in a paroxysm of disgust because a crowd of them had walked into the room where he was talking to that brown girl while she ironed. Even they, tough as they were, had seen something ominous in the gestures of the thin, unshaven man in shirt and pants, the cigarette trembling in his fingers as he lashed them with his incomparable tongue. A mistake, they muttered, and withdrew, ashamed. Neither he nor the girl had said a word for a long time, and then he had slipped away into the darkness.

As the evening wore on, it was evident that the people lodged beneath the straining awning, and attacked by the seas that leaped the bulwarks at uncertain intervals, would be in distress. The chief officer, in dirty white uniform and long rubber boots, came down the ladder from the bridge-deck and consulted with the bos'un, a harassed expression on his face as he looked around. The man crouching between bollard and bulkhead watched him with dislike. It was part of his character to hate uniforms; but behind that human trait there lurked the subtler reason that these men could not be induced to talk. They barked, or snarled, or grunted, or were sullenly silent. You couldn't get near them. He recalled the doctor, with his monocle, his spotless white and gold regalia, his cool, silent appraisal. They symbolized for him, these men, a world in which he had

failed to get a footing. Thinking of them, Sovranilla, with its pigs and fowls walking in and out among the humans in the adobe huts, was, by comparison, home. There everybody talked, interminable rigmaroles in Spanish, about nothing at all—about the pimple on the nose of the conductor just in on the train from Calomar, or the new white enameled basin Emilia Gurmiesindo had ordered from New York through Wong Choy's general store, or the bottle of perfume which the assistant commandant had smuggled for his wife, but which he had given to Vina Muñoz, who was not esteemed.

And there was another and subtler reason hiding like a shadow behind all this. He was unable to appreciate their fidelity to an abstraction. He could be inspired by those he knew. As he flinched from a great wave that roared along the rail and vanished without coming inboard, he had a sudden vivid consciousness of his affection for the folk in Sovranilla. But to work all one's life for people one never saw was folly. An idea! A chimera! And no doubt flung aside when they were too old, eh?

He would have plunged into a fresh depth of imaginative reflections had not the whole ship sprung to life before his eyes. The officer stiffened to an alert rigidity as the whistle whined and blared suddenly above them, three long blasts, and then he ran to the side. The sailors followed suit, lining the bulwarks. The sound of men running came to the ears of the man crouching out of sight. He could remain in this position no longer. He rose, and looking earnestly at his little valise, walked to the side.

At first nothing could be seen save the great foam-flecked planes of the sea, a series of enormous and advancing ridges with toppling white crests as they passed; and the glare of the portholes so illuminated them that beyond was a place of vague darkness. But as he gazed, he saw, away on the starboard bow, a slow rising globe of intense light, a globe that exploded into a cascade of distant spangles. As the radiance died out and the ship sloped sharply forward down the weather side of a wave, he saw something else, which evoked from his troubled and weary spirit a sigh of relief. Only for a moment he caught the deep red glow of the wreck-buoy outside Sovranilla, and then it disappeared.

At once, as that rocket ascended into the distant darkness, the officer and his crew abandoned their plans of moving the deckers to some other part of the ship and ran up the ladders to the boat-deck away above them. And it was easy in the confusion for the man who had stood beside them at the bulwarks to follow unobserved. The mere act of ascending was an inspiration to him. For a moment he shrank back as he found himself confronting the long smooth camber of the promenade deck, with its colored lights and recumbent forms; and then he sprang on up the next ladder, and came out upon a place of baffling obscurity and a masterful rushing wind.

For here was no water, only a ceaseless pressure of air. It roared about him as he stumbled over deadeyes and guy-ropes. It tore at the collar of his shirt and flapped the trousers about his knees and ankles. But he gained what he wanted, a high clear view of that ruby light; and he clung to the corner of a deck-house and watched it. All about him were men shouting as they toiled above one of the boats. The wavering beam of a flash-light suddenly threw them into brilliant relief, and their eager faces as they turned gave them the appearance of a party of conspirators. He shrank back into the shadow of the house as the light advanced. No one, as far as he could imagine, had noticed his hurried ascent with the crew. And now, while they were putting the boat out over the water, his mind became clogged with sensations.

He became aware that he was concealed from view by the very thing he had set out to seek. He could no longer see either the men at work or the ascending rockets from the bark on her beam-ends below the bluff, or the ruby light winking from the wreck-buoy. He was in deep shadow, and sheltered from the roaring wind. And an ecstasy assaulted him, a desire, not so much to do what he had vividly imagined, as to see if for once his imagination had not played him false. And he began to explore, concentrating in a few moments some of those discoveries often spread over years.

For while he was feeling for the door, behind which lay the money that had obsessed him, he was also exploring his

own nature. He was conscious of standing beside himself and watching with painful curiosity what he would do. The door, of course, would be locked, but there was a window, a round scuttle opening inward and too small even for the strong boy the captain had sardonically specified. And he saw himself reach an arm into that window, and felt beneath his hand the rough edges of a barrel-head. For an instant he was almost in a swoon as he saw the enterprise crowned with success. A determined struggle with the door, a dozen swift journeys to the deserted lee rail, a quick fixing of position in his mind, and then away down to the raucous uproar of the deckers, stage by stage, emerging from some dark corner where he had been sleeping in innocence through the storm. How could they suspect him? He fondled the smooth perfection of the plan.

For once his imagination had not fooled him. Here it was, at last, the authentic foot of the rainbow. He saw himself in Sovranilla, telling the children, as the passing rain-squall fled over the emerald and silver waves, that there was a cask of gold at the foot of yonder colored arch. He would make an allegory of it, until the time came when they could go out and see how truly he had spoken.

And that thought made him shrink back as if he had been struck suddenly in the darkness. He felt the hot plates of the funnel against his hands and shoulders. There it was again, that devil with the forked tongue as it were, the devil of loquacity. He sprang away and stumbled aft until he came to the rail overlooking the awning. It was going, the wind was ripping it, halyard by halyard, and he could discern the hullabaloo of the helpless folk dodging the ruthless lashings of the canvas. Could he accomplish nothing without this ebullient verbiage? His hands closed desperately on the rail, as if the rushing wind was a fate trying to bear him away.

And as he stood there, fate came to him, in the guise of a man in oilskins who bumped into him in the darkness, who asked him who he was, and without waiting for an answer bade him go forward and man the boat.

He thought, afterward, when he had reached it, had clambered into it as it swayed on the outswung davits,

that he must have spoken at length to the man in the oil-skins—a man with a voice both furry and hoarse, red-faced and solemn under the sou'wester tied below his chin. Must have done that. The words of that man sang in his ears like harpstrings: For the Lord's sake, shut up—not so much conversation—talk later—see the rockets—get in—ready, bos'un?—then lower away!

The ship had been stopped, and by the time the boat began to descend, all way was gone from her. And it seemed to him, as he sat in the boat among a half-dozen of silent men, that their rapid passing by lighted deck and bright portholes, row on row, into the darkness below, was a symbol of life. Consecrated to a high purpose, they descended into unknown perils as if from another world; and suddenly they were afloat and the falls unhooked, and they were pulling with a mystical union of energy toward a cascade of falling stars.

Here, for a stark materialist, the episode would have ended in failure. But for him it was a revelation of his own potential character. Sitting there in the obscurity of the storm, joined with unseen and unknown men in a common beneficent endeavor, he shed the pretentious trappings of an irksome life-habit and comprehended resolutely his true bearings. He saw them as, when he was poised high upon a lofty wave-crest, the ruby light of the wreck-buoy shone across to him. He saw them when, after enormous labor, they had won to the lee side of the great bark, dismasted and careened upon the white-toothed rocks below the bluffs. He saw them as those frightened and weary men tumbled aboard with a shout and a whimper of delight. But he saw them best of all when, after the long, long pull, they gained the little harbor and stood at last upon the jetty below the silent huts of Sovranilla. It was the moment of dawn, and the steamer was standing in toward the anchorage. None of the strangers noted his gesture as he faced the eastern ranges where the sun had touched the snowy summits of the Andes with rose. It was a gesture of surrender and illumination, a symbol of what he now comprehended and believed.

And often, in after days, the children would see him

pause in his talk when a rain-squall fled away over the Caribbean, and make that gesture toward the rainbow, watching in silence where the shaft of it sank into the emerald sea.

LION'S COURAGE¹

By G. B. MACKENZIE

(From *The Atlantic Monthly*)

I

FRESH from the nearest approach to a bath that he ever allowed himself, Monsieur Eugène Danou pulled his woolen undervest, still warm from a recent night's use, again over his head, stretched toward the foot of the bed where hung his trousers, and so progressed from stage to stage, until his mirror and an habitual feeling of correctness indicated the practical completion of a careful and unhurried toilet.

He then shook a little brilliantine into his hand, rubbed the palms together, and devoted two minutes to the violent friction of his rather scanty, graying hair. This done, he plied comb and brush with care, flicked a suspicion of dandruff from the shoulders of his shiny black coat, and, striding across the small bedroom, flung open the casement window.

The freshness of a bright May morning in this pleasant suburb of Paris had its effect on the impressionable little commercial traveler, and his rising spirits found outlet in a gay snatch of tune. He accepted his unaccustomed cheerfulness as a favorable omen, and stood for a little, breathing the fine air and watching the approaching paper-boy follow a leisurely and erratic course along the street.

For the first time in his twenty years' experience of the Road, M. Danou was without a situation. Nor was he suffering for any fault of his own. When it came to selling gentlemen's hats, it was admitted that, despite a vague timidity of manner (the peeping skeleton in an otherwise perfect cupboard), the quiet little hard-working traveler

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was without a rival. His employers, expert character-readers, had hesitated before promoting him to the position of head salesman; but a fuller sense of his own importance seemed to fill M. Danou from that moment, and they never had reason to regret their decision. In his selling, indeed, appeared occasional flashes of brilliance. He took daring chances for his firm, and was consistently successful; more than once he displayed a boldness that astonished his rivals.

"Success has been the making of our little Danou," his fellow travelers would whisper behind their hands of an evening in the small-town commercial hotels; "since he has become chief *représentant* for Monod Frères he is bold as a lion."

And Danou, whose hearing was good, caught the sense of these remarks in his corner before the fire, and swelled inwardly with gratification.

"The lion's boldness is bluff; he is a coward at heart," muttered an old man once on the opposite side of the chimney. His words were, however, lost in the general noise of the talk, and M. Danou retired early, the compliment still ringing in his ears. During the night suggestion did its work, and when he awoke, the lion was bolder than before.

One day a friend sat in a railway carriage listening to M. Danou's tale of a recent daring coup. "And what would have happened had you been unsuccessful?" queried the friend.

"My firm would have lost some fifty thousand francs," replied their *représentant*, not without pride.

"And you—would you have lost your situation?"

M. Danou thought for a moment; then he gave a little shrug. "It is a thing I have not considered," he replied briefly, and changed the subject.

A chance question in a railway carriage—

Maria, his wife, noticed the change within five minutes of his home-coming the following Friday. She was almost the only person who realized his weakness, and it had been her especial care for years to watch over him, lending him her strength when he required it. From this day forward she redoubled her efforts.

Learning by a few keen questions the reason of his sudden *malaise*, she at once set about her task of reassuring him. She dwelt upon his great experience, his wonderful successes. She argued with the skill of a lawyer, the conviction of a fanatic, the intensity of her love. She named him half a dozen firms who would jump at the chance of his services should the occasion arise, and eventually she succeeded—succeeded, that is, in restoring his self-confidence as a salesman. What might lie beyond, it was fortunately unnecessary for her to consider.

When M. Danou returned home one gray evening in March, he brought the news that MM. Lefèvre et Cie., of Nancy, one of the most important hat-making establishments in France, had closed its doors. Maria watched him carefully as he sat after supper smoking before the fire. The serving-girl had washed up the dishes and gone home. It was an hour when they generally talked together of the day's happenings, or, if M. Danou had been away, gave one another a survey of their week's events.

This evening he was unusually silent, and when it came to nine o'clock, rose and fetched his boots. "I think I'll go along as far as the station," he remarked; "the late paper ought to be in by now."

There was only a short paragraph about the failure. As they already knew, it was due to the slump following the war boom, coupled with reviving competition from abroad. M. Danou took a serious view of the situation. "There will be more to follow," he prophesied, shaking his head; and for once all Maria's efforts to reassure him were unsuccessful. That night they both went to bed depressed: a fortnight later the old-established firm of Monod Frères discharged its three hundred employees, and followed its rival into liquidation.

In face of this unparalleled situation, M. Danou almost went to pieces. The nightmare of his life had become a reality; for with every firm in France cutting down staffs and reducing expenditure, the chance of finding employment for months, and possibly years, to come, appeared hopeless.

"How," he kept asking, "can a man, already past middle

age and with his knowledge and experience so specialized, adopt any other line of business than his own?"

As for traveling salesmen—they were clamoring for work by the hundred in the columns of every newspaper he took up; and as day followed unsuccessful day, and he trailed home in the evening, weary and hopeless from his fruitless seeking, even Maria at last began to look grave.

During the first week it had been bearable. When she met him at the station, as she made a point of doing when she knew the hour of his train, he would smile and joke, and ask her how she liked being among the unemployed. The knowledge that they would not immediately starve was a comfort for which he learned to thank Our Lady with greater fervency every day; and the few hundred francs a month which the revenue of his wife's untouched *dot* assured them certainly kept him from a premature despair. But there was hardly more than would keep body and soul together, and the need for finding a situation grew daily more pressing.

During the second week of unemployment, he ceased to joke; at the end of the second month, he was wallowing in gloom. "*Je ne suis bon à rien,*" he would mutter over and over to himself while she was washing up the supper things; "*I am good for nothing, nobody wants me; it is finished.*"

When the dishes were dry and piled in place in the old-fashioned buffet, she would draw her chair close to his and take his hand; and while she stroked it like a child's, little by little her influence would gain upon him. Generally she let him do the talking first; then, when he was wearied, she had her turn, sympathizing, reassuring, comforting. They spoke of old times, of his long and successful career, and a hundred little triumphs.

Then, with a bravery he never imagined, she turned to the future; and as she talked, he caught the spirit of her optimism. And there was a future for them yet—she knew it, if only her work of years would bear the test. She strove as never before to save what still remained as the fruit of her labors; and each night, when bedtime came, she found her Eugène again grown almost cheerful. But her triumphs were, as a rule, pitifully short-lived. His self-

confidence had a habit of draining away in the night, and he would awake each morning, despite her, to the hopeless darkness of the day before.

II

This morning was a notable exception. Could it be the swallows, swaying and chirruping on the telephone wires, or that cheery rascal of a paper-boy whistling his careless way out of sight? M. Danou's own little song changed to a whistle as he turned to wish his wife good-morning: such sleepy interchange of words as might take place on their awakening was never considered in the nature of a formal greeting.

His beloved Maria, short and well-covered, entered smiling from the kitchen. She seemed indifferent to the dirtiness of her yellow dressing-gown, and the numerous strands of chestnut hair that straggled untidily over her ample forehead. She would have cared as little had she realized the greasy smudge disfiguring an otherwise rosy cheek; for, although Parisian-born,—or perhaps because of it,—she considered that nothing should be allowed to interfere with the work to be done. Later, she would dress and powder with the best; but that would be in the afternoon, when the house was dusted and the remains of her midday meal had disappeared. In the morning she had more important things in hand.

"The newspaper, Eugène! Say now, there will perhaps be something today. But you must read it while you are drinking your chocolate: if we do not take our breakfast at once, I shall never have the time to go along to the market."

M. Danou, his favorite *Petit Parisien* in his hand, followed his wife into the small kitchen, where two cups of chocolate were already cooling, set out on a piece of oilcloth at one end of the table. Maria produced the long loaf of crusty bread left by the baker's boy an hour before, and with neither butter nor jam to color the meal, they began to eat.

Disregarding the news, the little man munched and drank in silence, while his eyes were running with the speed

of custom from one likely advertisement to another. The "Situations Vacant" column was not a long one that morning in the *Petit Parisien*, and he was nearing the bottom of a seemingly hopeless list, when—

Suddenly the honest little man's heart missed a beat. *Enfin!* There it was at last! But was it? He must make certain— Yes, indeed—

M. Danou forgot his very first rule of good society: "Maiah! Maiah,—oo!" he exploded in the middle of an enormous mouthful of crusty bread. A gulp of chocolate helped to render him coherent: then in an excited voice, a trembling finger to guide him, he read off his find.

"*Voilà*, Maria! There is my affair! Who would have thought to discover it today? and in the *journal*? Ah, and we have searched so long! I know the Maison Barthélmy in the Boulevard de Nîmes: they are a serious firm, who pay well their employees. M. Barthélmy, the principal, is a shrewd man, but bears a good reputation. If only I can manage to arrive before it is too late—"

"But it is perfect!" His wife had risen, and now leaned over the table by his side, her arm through his, to read the magic words.

"Head traveler . . . push the sale of gentlemen's hats.' It's exactly what you're waiting for, dearest, isn't it? But, Eugène—why do they put 'only those with absolute confidence in themselves need apply'? I don't think I quite like that: it sounds so—so funny."

"Not at all, darling—quite essential." His words came hastily in jerks, between mouthfuls. "Confidence? We travelers have to have confidence of course—never get on without—Absolute self-confidence—that's the secret—Often have to take important decisions—might be question of a hundred thousand francs one day. Thank God at least I've never suffered from nerves.

And a moment after, "For goodness' sake, hurry up with these boots, Maria; I know you're going to make me miss my train."

An hour later a little man, neatly but quietly dressed, entered M. Barthélmy's private office on the Boulevard de Nîmes. Behind the counter a girl sat, typing. She glanced

at his card. "If you've come about the advertisement," she said, "M. Barthélmy can't see you till four o'clock."

"My business is with your employer, mademoiselle, and not with you. Will you kindly tell him I am here?"

"Is it about the advertisement?"

M. Danou interested himself in a calendar on the wall, and made no reply.

With an angry glance that was entirely wasted upon him, the girl rose from her chair and pushed open a heavy door in the rear of the office. Hardly had she disappeared, before M. Danou had taken four swift strides round the counter. The inner-office door was not yet closed when it was opening again before him.

"Didn't he tell you his business?" The short wiry man with the pointed gray beard and searching eyes was tapping his desk irritably with the corner of M. Danou's card. He swung round sharply at the interruption.

"And what do you mean, monsieur, by coming in here without my permission?"

Briefly M. Danou explained his visit. "My twenty years' experience on the Road," he added, "has taught me to walk straight in when occasion demands. It has also taught me to arrive before the crowd. If I have annoyed you, I demand your pardon; but you see my business methods in operation—and at least you will hardly deny that I am here."

He took out a colored handkerchief and mopped his brow. The first round was his; had M. Barthélmy decided to turn him into the street without consideration, he would not continue to sit and study him as he was doing. This little success gave him just the fillip he required. The whole world seemed now at his feet if only he conducted himself carefully, and he found himself thinking back with amazement upon his recent long periods of depression.

"Will you give yourself the trouble of sitting down?"

In the outer office began the tap-tap-tap of the young girl's typewriter; here, the atmosphere was different, and very peaceful. Double windows, tightly closed, cut off the noises of the busy boulevard; heavy curtains and other wall hangings seemed to deaden even the ticking of the

large ormolu clock, set over the fireplace, below which a mass of glowing *boulets* sufficiently explained the oppressiveness of the atmosphere.

Although the furniture was a mixture of antique and modern, there was no suspicion of out-of-date-ness in the general effect; and if the principal of the firm himself appeared to belong to the preceding generation, it was only as long as he remained silent and absorbed. The penetration of his eyes and voice amazed M. Danou: they were almost sinister.

"Yes," resumed M. Barthélmy slowly after a few moments' scrutiny of the intruder, "yes, you are here. Do you smoke, monsieur? Accept a cigarette. And your credentials?"

Cursorily he glanced through the papers produced. He appeared more interested in observing the subject of them sitting before him, and while M. Danou chose a cigarette and proceeded to light it, followed attentively his every gesture. He noted the careless flick of match on box, the moment's guarding of the flame, the sudden glow of the closely-packed tobacco. M. Danou smoked rapidly, inhaling sharply and blowing out the pale blue clouds one upon another in quick succession.

M. Barthélmy handed back the reference. "It is easy to light a cigarette when one uses the Swedish matches, monsieur," he observed.

The other took a couple of quick puffs. "My faith, yes; I have never known them to fail. A pipe is sometimes difficult in the wind, but a cigarette"—he waved his hand, "so simple!"

"Yes—It is largely a matter of confidence, is it not? You know how we all of us feel when we have but one match that remains. Remember the care with which we rub the tip—how easily the stem may break—how small a breath extinguishes the flame."

M. Danou glanced quickly at the speaker. "A salesman has little time for nerves, monsieur," he replied shortly.

"And you?"

"I flatter myself—" He jerked off the first long ash into the waste-paper basket, and sat back in his chair puzzled.

He seemed to have lost, all of a sudden, the helm of this interview. Where, exactly, were they drifting?

M. Barthélmy remained silent.

"You have seen from my papers, monsieur, that as a salesman I have given satisfaction. Do I gather that the qualities you most demand are confidence and experience? And if that is so, is there any way in which I may satisfy you?"

He took three more quick pulls at his cigarette, but this time failed to displace the still-glowing ash.

M. Barthélmy cleared his throat. "As to your experience, I am satisfied. That you can fulfill my requirements, provided you have the necessary self-confidence, I have little doubt; but in this, my demands are above the average—and precise. I propose, with your agreement, to try a little experiment that has just occurred to me. It deals with just this point, and the result should be interesting. You permit?"

He placed his elbows on the desk, and allowed the tips of his thin, white fingers to rest lightly together.

M. Danou bowed.

"You will not, then, consider it an impertinence if I put to you rather a personal question." He paused. "You have, possibly,—er,—certain private moneys, monsieur? Savings, perhaps, on which you are living at present—a legacy from some dead relative?"

"There is my wife's *dot*," said M. Danou.

"Exactly! The only barrier between yourself and starvation—am I not right? The thing above all others that you fear to lose?"

The other nodded.

"You smoke quickly, monsieur." M. Danou's cigarette was more than half consumed. "Is it because they are such simple things to light, that you smoke your cigarettes so quickly?"

M. Danou, utterly befogged, laughed nervously.

"This is my proposition." A harder note crept into M. Barthélmy's voice. He continued: "When you have finished this cigarette—no, no, smoke it to the end, I beg of you! you will choose another, from my case or from your own, as

you prefer. From your box you will select one match. If you succeed, monsieur, in lighting your cigarette with the single match, you will have this situation; and my terms, you will find, are generous."

He stopped. M. Danou waited a moment for him to continue; then with a quick motion, threw his glowing stump into the fire, where it caught and burned up in a flash of yellow.

"Is that your only condition?" He had seized the first cigarette his fingers touched in the other man's case, and was already selecting a match.

"Not quite! You will remark that, if it were, you would have everything to gain by success, while in failing you would be losing nothing—nothing, that is, that belongs to you already. I can gauge a man's self-confidence by what he will stake on his success. By the way, I assume that you control this money of your wife's? Good! I make, then, this condition: you will give me your word of honor, in the presence of my typist, that, if you attempt my little experiment and fail, you will pay over to myself the full amount of your wife's *dot*, whatever that may be. That is my only condition. Have I made myself plain?"

He sat back, a little smile of irony twisting the pale lips, half-hidden by his moustache.

M. Danou deliberately laid down match and cigarette upon the desk. "If I fail—" he began slowly.

"And I happen to know that you will fail."

From outside, the muffled sounds of thronging traffic scarcely reached them. One huge vehicle, lumbering on its way, shook the glass in the windows and passed into the distance. Even from the chimneypiece the faint ticking of the clock was hardly audible while the two men eyed one another across the broad desk.

"You happen to know—"

"That you will fail."

A full minute passed while neither moved. Suddenly from within the clock came a sharp rattle. M. Danou jumped: "Fetch her in!" he snapped. He reached forward for the cigarette again, and as he examined it, his fingers were trembling.

The girl, summoned from her typing by the pressure of a button, quietly entered and stood by the door.

"Are you ready?"

The matches from the box were now scattered over the desk, and he was nervously examining each in turn.

"A moment, while I explain!"

In a few words M. Barthélmy had put the situation before his secretary. Wide-eyed, she nodded her understanding.

"And now," he continued turning to M. Danou, "you will give the required assurance to this lady and myself. Repeat these words: 'I promise—'"

M. Danou was choosing and rejecting match after match. His hands were shaking now so that he could scarcely pick them up. When he tried to speak, he made a husky sound in his throat, and had to swallow twice before he succeeded. "I promise—" he repeated, word after word to the end.

Another pause: the atmosphere itself seemed strung to breaking-point.

"All ready," said M. Barthélmy, leaning forward. Selecting one of the cigarettes himself, he picked up the match nearest to him—ignited it with a careless sweep on the side of the box. The next moment he was inhaling deeply.

For the space of several seconds M. Danou gazed at him, fascinated; then with a decisive movement forced his own cigarette between dry lips, grasped the box in his left hand, and snatched up a match. The safety-head was quivering on the striking surface: all he wanted was just to flick it along—only—to—flick—it—along— "But you will fail—"

It was like Maria's sob as the girl caught her breath.

With a sudden cry the little man was on his feet. Behind him, his chair crashed to the floor: match and box flew wildly toward the fire.

"*Mon dieu! mon dieu!* What am I doing? Maria! Maria!"

Next morning a charwoman, sweeping out an office in the Boulevard de Nîmes, discovered an unsmoked cigarette beneath the broad desk, where it must have rolled unnoticed. "It is well," she said, "my husband will be glad of this"; and she slipped it among the contents of her capacious pocket.

THE SAMUEL JOSEPHS¹

By KATHERINE MANSFIELD

(From *The Adelphi*)

THE Samuel Josephs were not a family. They were a swarm. The moment you entered the house they cropped up and jumped at you from under the tables, through the stair rails, behind the doors, behind the coats in the passage. Impossible to count them: impossible to distinguish between them. Even in the family groups that Mrs. Samuel Josephs caused to be taken twice yearly—herself and Samuel in the middle, Samuel with parchment roll clenched on knee and she with the youngest girl on hers—you never could be sure how many children really were there. You counted them, and then you saw another head or another small boy in a white sailor suit perched on the arm of a basket chair. All the girls were fat, with black hair tied up in red ribbons and eyes like buttons. The little ones had scarlet faces, but the big ones were white with black heads and dawning moustaches. The boys had the same jetty hair, the same button eyes, but they were further adorned with ink-black finger-nails. (The girls bit theirs, so the black didn't show.) And every single one of them started a pitched battle as soon as possible after birth with every single other.

When Mrs. Samuel Josephs was not turning up their clothes or down their clothes (as the sex might be) and beating them with a hairbrush, she called this pitched battle "airing their lungs." She seemed to take a pride in it, and to bask in it from far away like a fat general watching through field-glasses his troops in violent action.

Lottie's weeping died down as she ascended the Samuel Josephs' stairs, but the sight of her at the nursery door with swollen eyes and a blob of a nose gave great satisfac-

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tion to the little S. J.s, who sat on two benches before a long table covered with American cloth and set out with immense platters of bread and dripping and two brown jugs that faintly steamed.

"Hullo! You've been crying!"

"O-oh! Your eyes have gone right in!"

"Doesn't her nose look funny!"

"You're all red-an'-patchy!"

Lottie was quite a success. She felt it and swelled, smiling timidly.

"Go and sit by Zaidee, ducky," said Mrs. Samuel Josephs, "and Kezie—you sit at the end by Boses."

Moses grinned and pinched her behind as she sat down, but she pretended to take no notice. She did hate boys!

"Which will you have?" asked Stanley (a big one), leaning across the table very politely and smiling at Kezia. "Which will you have to begin with—strawberries and cream or bread and dripping?"

"Strawberries and cream, please," said she.

"Ah-h-h!" How they all laughed and beat the table with their teaspoons. Wasn't that a take-in! Wasn't it! Wasn't it, now! Didn't he fox her! Good old Stan!

"Ma! She thought it was real!"

Even Mrs. Samuel Josephs, pouring out the milk and water, smiled indulgently. It was a merry tea.

After tea the young Samuel Josephs were turned out to grass until summoned to bed by their servant-girl standing in the yard and banging on a tin tray with a potato-masher.

"Know what we'll do," said Miriam. "Let's go an' play hide-an'-seek all over Burnells'. Their back door is still open because they haven't got the sideboard out yet. I heard Ma tell Glad Eyes *she* wouldn't take such ole rub-bish to a new house! Come on! Come on!"

"No, I don't want to," said Kezia, shaking her head.

"O-oh! Don't be soft. Come on—do!"

Miriam caught hold of one of her hands; Zaidee snatched at the other.

"I don't not want to, either, if Kezia doesn't," said Lottie, standing firm. But she, too, was whirled away. Now the whole fun of the game for the S. J.s was that the Burnell

kids didn't want to play. In the yard they paused. Burnells' yard was small and square, with flower beds on either side. All down one side big clumps of arum lilies aired their rich beauty; on the other side there was nothing but a straggle of what the children called "grandmother's pincushions," a dull, pinkish flower, but so strong it would push its way and grow through a crack of concrete.

"You've only got one w. at your place," said Miriam, scornfully. "We've got two at ours. One for men and one for ladies. The one for men hasn't got a seat."

"Hasn't got a seat!" cried Kezia. "I *don't* believe you."

"It's-true-it's-true-it's-true! Isn't it, Zaidee?" And Miriam began to dance and hop, showing her flannelette drawers.

"Course it is," said Zaidee. "Well, you *are* a baby, Kezia!"

"I don't not believe it either, if Kezia doesn't," said Lottie, after a pause.

But they never paid any attention to what Lottie said. Alice Samuel Josephs tugged at a lily leaf, twisted it off, turned it over. It was covered on the under side with tiny blue and grey snails.

"How much does your Pa give you for collecting snails?" she demanded.

"Nothing!" said Kezia.

"Reely! Doesn't he give you anything? Our Pa gives us a ha'penny a hundred. We put them in a bucket with salt and they go all bubbly, like spittle. Don't you get any pocket money?"

"Yes, I get a penny for having my hair washed," said Kezia.

"An' a penny a tooth," said Lottie, softly.

"My! Is that *all*! One day Stanley took the money out of all our money boxes, and Pa was so mad he rang up the police-station."

"No, he didn't. Not reely," said Zaidee. "He only took the telephone down an' spoke in it to frighten Stan."

"Ooh, you fibber! Ooh, you are a fibber!" screamed Alice, feeling her story totter. "But Stan was so frightened he caught hold of Pa and screamed and bit him and then

he lay on the floor and banged with his head as hard as ever."

"Yes," said Zaidee, warming. "And at dinner, when the door bell rang an' Pa said to Stan, 'There they are—they've come for you,' do you know what Stan did?" Her button eyes snapped with joy. "He was sick—all over the table!"

"How perfectly *horrid*," said Kezia, but even as she spoke she had one of her "ideas." It frightened her so that her knees trembled, but it made her so happy she nearly screamed with joy.

"Know a new game," said she. "All of you stand in a row and each person hold a narum lily head. I count one—two—three, and when 'three' comes all of you have to bite out the yellow bit and scrunch it up, and who swallows first—wins."

The Samuel Josephs suspected nothing. They liked the game. A game where something had to be destroyed always fetched them. Savagely they broke off the big white blooms and stood in a row before Kezia.

"Lottie can't play," said Kezia.

But anyway it didn't matter. Lottie was still patiently bending a lily head this way and that—it would not come off the stem for her.

"One—two—three," said Kezia.

She flung up her hands with joy as the Samuel Josephs bit, chewed, made dreadful faces, spat, screamed, and rushed to Burnells' garden tap. But that was no good: only a trickle came out. Away they sped, yelling.

"Ma! Ma! Kezia's poisoned us."

"Ma! Ma! Me tongue's burning off."

"Ma! Ooh, Ma!"

"Whatever is the matter?" asked Lottie, mildly, still twisting the frayed, oozing stem. "Kin I bite my lily off like this, Kezia?"

"No, silly." Kezia caught her hand. "It burns your tongue like anything."

"Is that why they all ran away?" said Lottie. She did not wait for an answer. She drifted to the front of the house and began to dust the chair legs on the lawn with a corner of her pinafore.

Kezia felt very pleased. Slowly she walked up the back steps and through the scullery into the kitchen. Nothing was left in it except a lump of gritty yellow soap in one corner of the window-sill and a piece of flannel stained with a blue-bag in the other. The fireplace was choked with a litter of rubbish. She poked among it for treasure, but found nothing except a hair tidy, with a heart painted on it, that had belonged to the servant-girl. Even that she left lying, and she slipped through the narrow passage into the drawing-room.

The Venetian blind was pulled down but not drawn close. Sunlight, piercing the green chinks, shone once again upon the purple urns brimming over with yellow chrysanthemums that patterned the walls. The hideous box was quite bare, so was the dining-room, except for the sideboard that stood in the middle forlorn, its shelves edged with a scallop of black leather. But this room had a "funny" smell. Kezia lifted her head and sniffed again, to remember. Silent as a kitten she crept up the ladder-like stairs. In Mr. and Mrs. Burnell's room she found a pill-box, black and shiny outside and red in, holding a blob of cotton wool. "I could keep a bird's egg in that," she decided. The only other room in the house—the little tin bathroom did not count—was *their* room, where Isabel and Lottie had slept in one bed and she and Grandma in another. She knew there was nothing there; she had watched Grandma pack. Oh, yes, there was! A stay button stuck in a crack of the floor and in another crack some beads and a long needle. She went over to the window and leaned against it, pressing her hands against the pane.

From the window you saw beyond the yard a deep gully filled with tree ferns and a thick tangle of wild green, and beyond that there stretched the esplanade bounded by a broad stone wall against which the sea chafed and thundered. (Kezia had been born in that room. She had come forth squealing out of a reluctant mother in the teeth of a Southerly Buster. The Grandmother, shaking her before the window, had seen the sea rise in green mountains and sweep the esplanade. The little house was like a shell to its loud booming. Down in the gully the wild trees lashed

together and big gulls, wheeling and crying, skimmed past the misty window.)

Kezia liked to stand so before the window. She liked the feeling of the cold, shining glass against her hot little palms, and she liked to watch the funny white tops that came on her fingers when she pressed them hard against the pane.

As she stood the day flickered out and sombre dusk entered the empty house, thievish dusk stealing the shapes of things, sly dusk painting the shadows. At her heels crept the wind, snuffing and howling. The windows shook, a creaking came from the walls and the floors, a piece of loose iron on the roof banged forlornly. Kezia did not notice these things severally, but she was suddenly quite, quite still, with wide-open eyes and knees pressed together—terribly frightened. Her old boggy, the dark, had overtaken her, and now there was no lighted room to make a despairing dash for. Useless to call "Grandma!"—useless to wait for the servant-girl's cheerful stumping up the stairs to pull down the blinds and light the bracket lamp. There was only Lottie in the garden. If she began to call Lottie *now* and went on calling loudly all the while she flew downstairs and out of the house, she might escape from It in time. It was round like the sun. It had a face. It smiled, but It had no eyes. It was yellow. When she was put to bed with two drops of aconite in the medicine glass It breathed very loudly and firmly, and It had been known on certain particularly fearful occasions to turn round and round. It hung in the air. That was all she knew, and even that much had been very difficult to explain to Grandmother.

Nearer came the terror, and more plain to feel the "silly" smile. She snatched her hands from the window-pane, opened her mouth to call Lottie, and fancied that she did call loudly, though she made no sound. It was at the top of the stairs; It was at the bottom of the stairs, waiting in the little dark passage, guarding the back door. But Lottie was at the back door, too.

"Oh, there you are!" she said, cheerfully. "The storeman's here. Everything's on the dray—and *three* horses, Kezia! Mrs. Samuel Josephs has given us a big shawl to wear round us, and she says 'Button up your coat.' She

won't come out because of asthma, and she says, 'Never do it again.'" Lottie was very important.

"Now then, you kids," called the storeman. He hooked his big thumbs under their arms. Up they swung. Lottie arranged the shawl! "most beautifully," and the storeman tucked up their feet in a piece of old blanket.

"*Lift* up! Easy does it!" They might have been a couple of young ponies.

The storeman felt over the cords holding his load, unhooked the brake-chain from the wheel, and, whistling, he swung up beside them.

"Keep close to *me*," said Lottie, "because otherwise you pull the shawl away from my side, Kezia."

But Kezia edged up to the storeman. He towered up beside her, big as a giant, and he smelled of nuts and wooden boxes.

OAKFIELD HOUSE¹

By ARCHIBALD MARSHALL

(From *The London Mercury* and *The Red Book Magazine*)

I

THOSE who were privileged to visit among the Best Families of Oakfield fifty years or so ago found them still shaking their heads at the coming of the railway. But there were some who held that the most serious blow was struck at the proud seclusion of their village when Lord Tonbridge sold Oakfield House a few years later.

There are other London suburbs within the four-mile radius, now submerged in the tide of brick and slate and asphalt, that were quiet villages within living memory. The rich merchants and bankers who lived about them were surrounded by many of the pleasures of a country existence, and could boast that no roof or chimney was to be seen from their windows. But there were few which possessed the almost feudal air of Oakfield, where my lord and my lady lived in the big house to which all the other houses looked up, drew agricultural rents, gave red cloaks to the children at Christmas time, drove to church every Sunday morning in a handsome equipage to listen to a sermon by the clergyman whom my lord had presented to the living, and exercised their rights of nomination to the Tonbridge almshouses.

A word must be said about these almshouses, which remained a source of pride to Oakfield long after it had lost every other vestige of its old-time quality. They had been built and endowed by the first lord in the seventeenth century, for the reception and maintenance of six poor gentlewomen of this and the neighbouring parishes. You

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From "The Clinton Twins," published by Dodd, Mead & Company.

can see them still standing in the busy suburban street, a long line of Jacobean stone, latticed windows, red roofs, carved doorways and chimney stacks, behind their little gardens bright with flowers, and topped by some fine elms which grow on the well-kept lawn that backs them—a very haunt of ancient peace and refuge in the midst of all the modern bustle. Each poor gentlewoman had two good rooms of her own and a sufficient allowance to support the gentility to which all of them clung so pathetically. Gentility was a tremendous thing among these poor women left stranded by the ebb of life, and the terms of the original bequest enabled them to hold up their heads among their neighbours, even though in the receipt of charity.

Oakfield House was thus more than a mere nobleman's villa within an easy drive of London. It was a nobleman's country seat, though not one of the most resplendent. It was a large stone mansion standing in a fine park, with home farm adjoining; and it was possible to say, as most people who went there did say, that it might be a hundred miles away from a town. So, when it came to be sold, it conferred a dignity upon its purchaser that would not have gone with many a house of more magnificence.

This dignity was acquired by Mrs. Godbee, together with the house, the gardens, the park, and the buildings of the home farm; and nobody could have made better use of it.

Mrs. Godbee was the widow of a clergyman who had been chaplain to a Duke, and she had taught their lessons to His Grace's five daughters, and to a few more carefully selected children whose parents basked in the radiance surrounding the ducal residence. She had, in fact, conducted a little school in her husband's Rectory and conducted it so well that the Duchess, who, rather in advance of her time, took an interest in women's education, had kept her daughters entirely in the country during the ordinary school terms, for the benefit of Mrs. Godbee's teaching.

When her husband died, Mrs. Godbee was ready with her plans for starting a super-ladies' school. None but girls of the most unimpeachable quality were to be educated at it. They were to be surrounded by all the spacious amenities that they would enjoy in their own homes; and they were

to have the best education that money, and Mrs. Godbee, could provide.

The Duchess interested herself in the scheme, and lent her youngest daughter, as groundbait, for a year. She persuaded the Duke to finance the undertaking. He was a sporting, kind-hearted nobleman, and it amused him to devise means of advancing it. It was he who saw what a valuable factor towards success Oakfield House would be, when it came into the market at just the right time. It was near enough to London for the young ladies to be taken to classical concerts, picture-galleries, lectures, and the more discreet kind of amusements, and to draw upon the metropolitan scholastic reservoir for supplementary "masters"; and yet a genuine country house, known to the elect, with its own park for the young ladies to play in, its own farm for the provision of eggs, milk, butter, its own gardens for vegetables and fruit, and so many other things of its own which girls' schools at that time were content to do without, that no wonder the rich but untitled herd were soon tumbling over one another to gain such advantages for their daughters. They would share them with the offspring of one Duke, two Earls, one Viscount and three Barons—this was the bag of the opening term—besides other children of high descent whose names spoke volumes to the initiate, though without the prefixes of "Lady" or "Honourable" that gave such an aristocratic air to the school list.

II

Oakfield House was a success from its scholastic start, and almost made up for the loss of my lord and my lady. Though it no longer housed the acknowledged leaders of Oakfield society, Mrs. Godbee immediately took her place in the sociabilities of the Best Families, and kept it. She was a woman of intellect and character, and did well by the children committed to her charge. She could have doubled her numbers at any time during the twenty years in which she held the reins, but she kept to her original thirty, and refused on any consideration to take day-scholars. The daughter of Mr. Brett, Vicar of Oakfield, came to her as a

boarder, and afterwards the daughters of Mr. Palfrey, Q.C., who lived in the house that his father, the Judge, had built for himself. So she was absolved from the suspicion of holding herself above her neighbours, who were proud of her, and of her always advancing reputation in the scholastic world.

During those twenty years the meadowed wooded cup of Oakfield was filling up. The weekly market ceased to be held in the cobbled market square, but otherwise it was much the same as it had been for a century past, with its red-brick house-fronts and bow-fronted small-paned shop-windows, which only here and there had given place to plate glass and stuccoed façades. And the fields and gardens and country lanes on that side of the little town where Oakfield House stood at the summit of a gentle rise were still unspoilt, with just now and then a pasture or an arable field converted into another large garden for another comfortable well-built house.

If all Oakfield had been allowed to grow upon *those* lines, said the Best Families, who mostly lived upon this side, there would have been nothing to grumble at, considering that *some* change must be expected, with St. Paul's Cathedral only four miles distant, and the train journey to the City done in twenty minutes. But upon the other side there was building going on all the time. Oakfield was becoming a populous place, and it was no longer possible to know all your neighbours at least by sight.

By the time Mrs. Godbee died, Oakfield was generally recognized as a London suburb, and not as a country place near London. Her school lists were still salted with aristocratic names, but these no longer provided the bulk of the reading. The young ladies who took horse exercise found their rides increasingly limited, as the country around was eaten up bit by bit; and it was not possible now to imagine yourself a hundred miles from London, even inside the park of Oakfield House, for roofs and chimneys could be seen through the trees on all sides.

Miss Godbee, however, succeeded to a valuable property. There was still virtue in the mansion, and the park, and the farm, and the list of titled references in the prospectus. If

the aristocracy now preferred to send its daughters to school elsewhere than in a growing suburb, there were still plenty of people willing to pay the high fees demanded by Miss Godbee, who kept up the tradition, if not so much the actuality, of exclusiveness inaugurated by her mother.

Miss Godbee had been educated up to the last limit, with a view of joining her mother in managing the school and eventually succeeding her, always supposing she did not marry in the meantime. She did not marry, for reasons which need not concern us, and after imbibing learning at Oakfield House until she was nineteen, and spending a year in Paris, a year in Dresden, and a year in Florence, she began her life work. At the age of thirty-five she took up the sole rule, upon the death of her mother.

III

At the end of five years the atmosphere of Oakfield House had changed. If there was one word that Mrs. Godbee would have rejected as describing her school, it was "fashionable." Under Miss Godbee it was best described as fashionable. A great deal of attention was paid to dress: Mrs. Godbee had encouraged a spotless simplicity. Manners and deportment were taught: Mrs. Godbee had inculcated unselfishness and consideration for others, and left manners to take care of themselves. Luxury had crept in: Mrs. Godbee's regimen had been almost Spartan, though everything she had given her pupils had been of the best. In a word, Mrs. Godbee had put education first and flourished on it; Miss Godbee put fashion first, and declined.

At the end of ten years the school list was no longer sown broadcast. There was not a name in it that would have attracted a parent of the class that had entrusted its girls to Mrs. Godbee. But Oakfield House was still "fashionable," and still full.

Miss Godbee attributed the change in the quality of her girls to the change in Oakfield itself, by this time connected with London by miles of streets, which also ran long past it, and on either side. It had become submerged. The old market-place was no longer recognizable for what it had

been. A few of the old shops still stood their ground, but all the residential houses had disappeared. Electric trams clanked up and down the busy "boulevard," which had been an elm-shaded garden-bordered lane when Mrs. Godbee had first come to Oakfield House. The greater part of the park had been turned into a public garden, so that the young ladies still looked out of their windows upon trees and grass. But they also looked out upon a large number of their fellow-creatures, and did not enjoy privacy when they played their games in the space that was left to them. For the fence that divided them from the vulgar herd was easy to be scaled by an active urchin, and no vigilance on the part of the park keepers could keep it clear of applauding but derisive onlookers.

Miss Godbee often talked of removing her school into the country, and if she had done so in good time it might have retained something of its exceptional quality, which it gradually lost as the years went by and rural Oakfield disappeared.

Mrs. Godbee had been more interested in the work of her school than in making money out of it. She did make a lot of money, but she spent it freely. Her fees were high, but she gave good value for them and saved little. She might have bought the freehold of Oakfield House with the profits of her first few years. If she had done that, and Miss Godbee had sold it at the right time, there would have been no difficulty in starting again elsewhere, or in retiring with a handsome competence. But Mrs. Godbee had paid interest on the purchase price as rent, and it was others who made the profits when the price of building land in Oakfield so enormously appreciated. Miss Godbee was less of a business woman than her mother, and eventually found herself paying twice as much rent for the house and five acres of ground as her mother had paid for house, farm, and forty acres. And there were liabilities besides which made it impossible for her to get out, with any money at all left over.

It was at this point that, becoming seriously alarmed, she reduced her fees for boarders, and opened the exclusive doors of Oakfield House to day-scholars.

IV

If the rapid development of Oakfield brought decay to the fortunes of Miss Godbee, there were others of its inhabitants who greatly profited by it.

When Mrs. Godbee opened her school, in the quiet country place that Oakfield then was, she conferred great benefit upon the local tradespeople. His lordship had provided good custom during the few months of the year in which he was in residence, but it was nothing to compare with that of Mrs. Godbee, ministering to the healthy appetites of her thirty young ladies, and of all the people who taught them or waited upon them. It was an auspicious day for John Flitch, Family Butcher, when Mrs. Godbee bestowed her patronage upon him, passing by his more important rival, whose insistence upon his right to go on serving Oakfield House had displeased the autocratic dame.

If the question had been asked among the Best Families, who was the happiest young man in Oakfield at that time, they would no doubt have looked for him among themselves, for they would hardly have admitted that any one outside their circle could be completely and legitimately happy. Yet a more extended field might very well have brought up John Flitch, Junior, as a candidate.

This young man had taken very kindly to his father's business, and liked especially the duties which fell to his share of calling on customers for their orders, and afterwards fulfilling them. He enjoyed his cheery word at the back doors of the houses he called at, and had many friends among the maids of the larger houses and the mistresses of the smaller. It was mostly the smaller houses in the newer parts of Oakfield that he served, and he was greatly envious of the two assistants of Barrow & Co., who carried their baskets on horseback, while he trudged it with his.

Envy, however, had not made a serious mark upon his nature before the great windfall of Mrs. Godbee's custom changed his outlook altogether. His father firmly grasped this gift of fortune, and determined to build still greater things upon it. He bought two ponies at a handsome price, and a cart shining with varnish and gold leaf, upon which his name and style were emblazoned. In the fresh

morning hours, John Flitch, Junior, rode round to collect orders. An hour or two later he drove his second pony in the flashing cart to deliver them. Dressed in clean butcher's blue, with his dark uncovered head well pomaded, he was the type and image of dashing young butchers, exulting in naked speed, whether mounted in the saddle or seated aloft on his high cart, whistling and singing out of the joy of his exuberant heart, and an object to be cherished in many a print-covered female bosom, as he clattered along by the lilacs and laburnums of the new suburban streets, or sent the mud flying in the country lanes.

For with the mark of prosperity shown by this wise investment in horseflesh his father's business increased rapidly, and within a year John Flitch & Son were making quite as much money as Barrow & Co., and likely to make still more.

John Flitch, Junior, never whistled or sang as he passed through the lodge gates of Oakfield House, and rode or drove through the park to the back regions of the mansion. He was still under the sobering influence of its former high dignity; for to serve his lordship had been something like gaining a Royal Warrant to an Oakfield tradesman, and John Flitch had never looked so high. Moreover, to the mind of John Flitch, Junior, so susceptible to feminine charm, the fair demesne where those delicate high-bred maidens walked or played in their wide but sheltered seclusion was as a garden of enchantment, in which it behooved a male creature, admitted to it for certain specific services, to bear himself with the utmost caution and restraint, for fear of being banished for ever from the hallowed precincts.

The young man, so bold with his eyes and so ready with his tongue in less awe-inspiring surroundings, would trot along the drive to Oakfield House without so much as a roving eye at the young nymphs who sometimes disported themselves within his enraptured sight, although he was intensely aware of them, and fed his soul with fluttering hopes that his gallant bearing might be the object of remark. It was for them he pomaded his locks and saw to the set of his blue coat, for them he cultivated that easy horseman-like trot, so different from the scattering canter with which

he struck admiration from the eyes of nursemaids outside this guarded garden of romance; it was with reference to them that his feeling for Mrs. Godbee was one of worshipful awe. He would have done anything to make a good impression on her; but on the only occasion on which he was privileged to interview her, when she gave him a Christmas box with her own hand, he was so tongue-tied that he could hardly congratulate himself upon having made any impression at all, except, possibly, one of respectful idiocy.

V

No doubt it was good for John Flitch, Junior's, soul, otherwise prone to bold adventure, to taste of this worshipful timidity before the delicate blossoms of girlhood that grew on a bush so far beyond his reach. Nothing came of it, except a fragrant memory. Within a year or two his father's business had so developed itself that he had to relinquish his morning rides and drives to others, and take up more responsible duties. Matrimony claimed him, and he made a good husband and father, though not without an appreciative eye to feminine charm outside his own home.

He had inherited his father's spirit of enterprise, and had more than his father's business capacity. Within a few years the firm of Flitch & Son had far outdistanced that of Barrow & Co. The growth of Oakfield brought ever increasing custom, and by and by large profits. After his father's death he embarked boldly upon the Higher Butchering, and, as a Meat Salesman, joined the ranks of business men as distinguished from those of tradespeople.

At the time that Miss Godbee was beginning to feel her burdens, John Flitch—Junior no longer—was living in a large house with a large garden on the outskirts of Oakfield, and going up to London to his business on most days of the week, like the great majority of his neighbours. At other times he was driving himself round to his various thriving retail establishments in a well-appointed phaëton, with a pair of good horses and a smart-looking groom behind. He was well turned out himself, his hair still sleek, though no longer black, his silk hat shining, a flower in the

buttonhole of his fawn, saucer-buttoned driving-coat. He was one of the most prosperous inhabitants of the now populous suburb, and his yearly income was generally supposed to run into five figures.

VI

By this time the character of Oakfield had completely changed. Its amenities had not yet entirely disappeared, but of the pleasant old-fashioned houses with the acres of gardens and paddocks surrounding them there were few left, and still fewer that were not shorn of most of their land. Of the Best Families there was a surviving remnant here and there, but they hardly counted among the crowd of newcomers. Even the bigger houses that had been built in the early days of Oakfield's development were occupied by people of a lower social quality—jovial well-living people, many of them, like John Flitch, with plenty of money to spend, and horses and billiard-rooms and cellars of wine to spend it on, who were quite satisfied with themselves and their suburb, within such convenient reach of London.

It was among this class that Miss Godbee, opening her exclusive portals at last to the influx of day-scholars, had to pick her difficult way. She still had the firm intention of keeping her school "select"; for among the crowd of nobodies who now made up most of the population of Oakfield there was still a recognizable upper crust, though it was but a pale shadow of the aristocracy formerly inherent in the Best Families.

Mr. Flitch was one of the first to apply for admission for the two of his daughters who were still of school age. He was stirred by the announcement of Miss Godbee's concession, which meant a good deal more to him than to others of his neighbours who were in a position to take advantage of it.

A quivering golden aura of romance still hung about Oakfield House, shorn as it was. Other parents might welcome the opportunity of sending their girls to a high-class school within reach of their own doors, but he would

be sending his, in imagination, to an enchanted palace, bright with the memories of his own vanished youth. He set out on foot to interview Miss Godbee, for it would have seemed like claiming some sort of equality to drive up to her door in his spanking equipage and his soul was humble on this point, though in the ordinary way he liked to air his opulence.

There were no lodge gates to Oakfield House now; the old entrance to the park gave access to the public gardens. But there were some forty or fifty yards of the carriage drive still remaining, and Mr. Flitch was affected by the memories brought to him as he trod the once familiar approach. Some years before, when the gardens were in course of making, he had stood where the new fence was going up, and gazed, under the same soft promptings of sentiment. Otherwise, he had not set eyes on Oakfield House for over thirty years.

There it was, just the same—the fine solid stone mansion, with its three long rows of windows, and enough left of its once spacious setting to preserve its ancient dignity, though modern brick and slate climbing the hill had hustled enviously around it. Really, thought the admiring Mr. Flitch, impressions of long ago reviving in him, it was still quite the nobleman's mansion, and a surprising place to come upon out of a street in urban Oakfield. Progress was all very well, but it would be a thousand pities if such a house as this were to be swept away, or even to lose any more of the ground that went with it, now of the highest building value. There was a slight air of decadence about it, which it had never had before, but probably a few hundred pounds spent on it would put that right. It must cost a lot of money to keep up such a house as that. Mr. Flitch had a dim recollection of having been asked recently by his Oakfield manager about Miss Godbee's account, and of telling him impatiently not to worry about it. Poor lady, if she had been a little pinched lately it was to be hoped that this new move on her part would put her right again. Perhaps he might give her an encouraging word on the number of parents he himself could influence; and as for her account, he would look into that, but certainly not

with the idea of pressing the best customer John Flitch & Son had ever had—one, indeed, upon whom his own handsome fortune might be said to have been founded; for he well remembered with what jubilation his father had taken one of his red-covered books and written "Mrs. Godbee, Oakfield House," upon its label.

VII

He was taken through the spacious hall, paved with black and white marble, and through a tall pedimented doorway, into Miss Godbee's morning-room, and waited there some little time for her. He had been in this room once before, when he had attended at Mrs. Godbee's request to receive his Christmas box. It had struck him then as a beautiful room for a lady to use, and struck him so now, although its quiet old-fashioned furnishing was less to his taste than the gilt and satin of the richer houses to which he had since grown accustomed. There was a large crayon portrait of Mrs. Godbee over the high mantelpiece—a speaking likeness of that commanding woman, which brought back to him a whiff of his youth. And, hanging over a rosewood cabinet, there was a smaller tinted drawing of Miss Godbee, as a young smiling girl, with the ringlets and sloping shoulders of the period.

He remembered her well now among the bevy—one of the fairest of them—though he had not, since he had known her by sight as the head of the school, recognized her as the girl of that drawing. He could feel himself squaring his shoulders as he trotted past a group of them sitting together under a tree on a hot summer morning with their needlework and their books. Ah, what a sweet place Oakfield had been in those days—all grass and trees and flowers and the song of birds—a fitting place for those ringleted, Leghorn-hatted maidens to sun themselves in, so far removed from the noise and smoke of the town! It suited him very well as it was now, but he had been happier in his coat of butcher's blue, driving his cart between the blossoming hedgerows, than now, as he guided his handsome pair through the traffic of the streets. It would per-

haps be an exaggeration to say that there was moisture in his eye as Miss Godbee came in and found him standing before her portrait; but if she had known how tender his heart was towards her she might not have greeted him with that frigid bow and enquiring lift of the eyebrows.

Miss Godbee no longer wore her hair in ringlets, and her shoulders, if still sloping, were disguised by the balloon sleeves of the period. But she was what was called in the parlance of the time an elegant woman, and Mr. Flitch felt no diminution of admiration for her as he turned from the youthful shadow to the middle-aged substance. He was a little short-sighted, and did not remark the chilliness of his reception, but opened out at once upon his business, with a good deal more suavity and address than he was accustomed to employ in opening up matters of business.

It had been a great pleasure to him to hear that the young ladies of the neighbourhood were to have the advantages at Oakfield House that everybody thought so highly of. He had two girls of the age of fifteen and sixteen, now at boarding-school at St. Leonards-on-Sea. He proposed to take them away at the end of the current term—forfeiting fees in lieu of notice—and send them to Oakfield House as day-scholars, if Miss Godbee would be good enough to accept them as pupils.

Miss Godbee motioned him to a seat, and took one herself, looking at the card which she held in her hand. It was his business card, for he had no occasion to use any others. She hesitated a moment, and then said, in the well-bred but slightly clipt accents that spoke alike of her upbringing and her avocation: "It is true, Mr.—er—Flitch, that I have decided to take a few day-scholars; but—I hardly know how to explain myself without possibly offending you—I had not thought of opening my school exactly to—er—er— I have talked to the Vicar about it, and there are one or two children—of people I know—whom I am ready to take, and others that he—er—might possibly recommend. But—"

"Oh, I think the Vicar would give me a recommendation, ma'am," he said, still bathed in the roseate glow of his admiration for all that she represented, "if a recom-

mentation is necessary. But I'm pretty well known in Oakfield, and— Well, I think you know me pretty well by reputation yourself, and Mrs. Godbee before you. I saw the beginnings of this school, ma'am, which I suppose there aren't many left in Oakfield who can say."

She seemed to take hold of herself, sat more upright, and said in a slightly harder voice: "I haven't the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Flitch."

"Dead, ma'am, I'm sorry to say, or I shouldn't be coming up to see you like this by myself. Ye-es, I've been a widower for three years, but my eldest girl, she was old enough to look after things when her poor mother died. I've got four girls, ma'am—no boys. They've all been to school at Miss Marriott's at St. Leonards—a very high-class school, and ought to be, for the money they charge, though I don't grumble at that, for what I say is, in education as in everything else, never mind what you pay as long as you get the best article. I don't know what Miss Marriott will say at my taking Winnie and Ethel away from her. She's told me that she looks upon them as among the brightest of her girls. Well, I wouldn't take them away to send them to any other school in England, or out of it for that matter. But of course I shall be glad to have them at home, and I shall look upon it as an honour to have them finish their education here; and if I may say so, ma'am, they'll do you credit—in looks as well as in learning."

Miss Godbee, who had listened quietly, with her eyes upon him, and a look of distaste in them, said something rather ineffective about the pity of taking girls away from a good school, especially as they would not have a mother's care at home; but Mr. Flitch brushed this aside. "They'll be well looked after at home, ma'am," he said; "and I know they'll be well looked after here. I've admired and looked up to this school for over forty years, and I shan't admire or look up to it less when the distance is decreased."

Mr. Flitch seemed to think this rather neat, for he smiled as he said it. Miss Godbee did not return his smile. Her soul was sore within her. It had gone hard with her to see the girls who came to her school gradually declining from the status of those with whom she had played and been

taught in her youth; and the change that she was about to make had been a bitter pill for her to swallow. She was not softened by Mr. Flitch's compliments. Of course he had looked up to the school; he would have been lost to all sense of proportion if he hadn't. She only saw him now rushing in to claim privileges which in the old days would have been miles out of the reach of such as he. She remembered him quite well as a young man coming to the back door of the house with his meat basket. She remembered particularly one hot Saturday morning when she and some other girls had been enjoying their weekly holiday sitting under a tree in the park, and they had laughed together at his self-conscious air as he had ridden past them on his way to the house. Alas! those happy summer days of girlhood, so free from care, were a long way off; but it would be a far blacker day for her than it actually was if she were forced to take in the daughters of her butcher, to fill the places of the sort of girls with whom she had been brought up. Her soul revolted at the idea. It was an insult on the part of this bold-looking, ogling, common man to come and propose it to her. And he actually took it for granted that she had come down to such an extent that a refusal on her part was out of the question.

She rose from her seat. "I am afraid I cannot take your daughters, Mr. Flitch," she said decisively. "I think you ought not to have asked me."

He was utterly surprised, and rose slowly from his seat, staring at her with open mouth. Her eyes were upon the card which she held in her hand, and enlightenment came to him in a flash.

He did not immediately take offence. In the old days, when he had been merely a retail butcher, though a very thriving one, he would not have expected his daughters to be taken in at a school like Miss Godbee's, nor would he have sent them now to a school which accepted the children of tradespeople. The line was clearly marked. And how should Miss Godbee know that he had raised himself so far above the rank of the shopkeepers of Oakfield?

"Ah, I see you're thinking of me just as Flitch, the butcher, ma'am," he said with an indulgent smile. "But

that was some years ago. It's true that I run my retail shops still, here and there, but I'm in business in a pretty big way in the City of London, and I don't think there are many schools in England that would refuse my girls. Miss Marriott takes the highest class of young lady, and she made no difficulty about it."

Miss Godbee's hand was on the bell. "I think, then, you had better keep your girls where they are, Mr. Flitch," she said. "I am sorry that I cannot take them at Oakfield House."

A maid appeared at the door before Mr. Flitch had time to reply, ushering in a lady who had come to call. Miss Godbee greeted her almost with effusion, but turned to Mr. Flitch in the middle of her welcome, and said: "Good afternoon," with a bow of dismissal.

Mr. Flitch hesitated a moment, and then allowed himself to be shown out, his face suddenly dark and angry.

VIII

Miss Godbee's visitor was a Mrs. Maynard, who had once lived in Oakfield and now lived in Lancaster Gate. She brought with her an air of bustling self-satisfied fashion. Miss Godbee had borne herself a little stiffly towards her in the old days, for she had climbed into the best society in Oakfield with the same ruthless determination as she had afterwards climbed out of it. But there hardly existed a best society in Oakfield now, and Miss Godbee was so changed in spirit that she felt a genuine impulse of gratitude towards a woman who had taken the trouble to drive out from London to see her, even though previous experience made it seem probable that Mrs. Maynard had done so chiefly to exhibit her superiority.

But it was balm to the poor outraged lady to pour out her grievance to sympathetic ears. Mrs. Maynard was horrified at the presumption of Flitch, the butcher, and Miss Godbee was supported in her feeling of having done the right thing in rejecting his proposal. She wanted this support, for a cold uneasiness was already creeping over her at a memory that she did not impart to Mrs. Maynard.

Mrs. Godbee had paid her books weekly, with unfailing regularity; so had Miss Godbee until a few years before, when she had found it more convenient to let some of them run on until school fees came in a lump. But lately even those had not sufficed to settle everything. For the first time for over forty years money was owing to the tradespeople who supplied Oakfield House; and the largest sum outstanding was owing to John Flitch & Son, Family Butchers.

Mrs. Maynard departed, and soon afterwards Mr. Horridge, the Vicar, called.

Mr. Horridge did not take the consoling view of her refusal that Mrs. Maynard had taken. Mrs. Maynard had said that if she once opened her doors to girls of that sort it was good-bye to everything. The Vicar seemed more inclined to think that it was good-bye to everything if she closed them. "You couldn't take the ordinary shopkeepers' daughters," he said. "Nobody would expect you to; they wouldn't expect it themselves. But Flitch isn't one of them. He's no different, really, from Brinton."

"Oh, but the Brintons are quite different," she expostulated. "I know that Mr. Brinton gets his money from those big stores at Elmstead; but he lives here in quite a private way, just like anybody else. Both his sons were at Oxford, and his girls are clever ladylike girls. I shan't mind having them at all."

"Flitch's girls are just as nice," said Mr. Horridge. "The stores at Elmstead sprang out of a grocer's shop, and Brinton's name was over the door when I first came here. Flitch has done much better for himself even than Brinton. Flitch is a rich man now. If he lived anywhere but at Oakfield, where he began, nobody would ever think of him as an ordinary butcher. I doubt if there's a school anywhere in the country that would refuse to take his daughters."

That was exactly what Mr. Flitch had said himself, and Miss Godbee's discomfort increased, especially when the Vicar went on to say: "You will have to take a large number of day-pupils if it's to be worth while taking any. Of course there are some quite good people living in Oakfield still—professional men and so on—but the people who live in the biggest houses are just like Flitch. In fact, he's considered

a sort of leader among them. They say he's worth ten thousand a year, and he spends his money freely. I should be afraid that if you have offended him he might influence others—against you, I mean. He and Brinton are friends, I know. I've dined at his house with the Brintons."

All this made Miss Godbee very unhappy. She discounted the Vicar's pessimism as far as she was able. It had given her a shock to hear that he had dined at Mr. Flitch's house. But he had always had the reputation of being willing to dine with anybody who would give him a good dinner. People had joked together about that when he had first come to Oakfield twenty years before, succeeding old Mr. Brett, who had never dined out except with the cream of the Best Families. But the people with whom Mr. Horridge had been criticized for consorting were very far above Flitch, the butcher, as Miss Godbee still saw him—as she had seen him, indeed, that very afternoon. Money could not gild him, but in the light of what the Vicar had said she absolved him from any presumption in expecting to send his girls to her. She hoped that her refusal had not been made in such a way as to offend him. There was even a slight aroma of the happy vanished years about Mr. Flitch. She remembered now that Sarah Gunning, whose father was a Master of Hounds, had said that he had a good seat on a horse, and somebody else had said once that if he hadn't ridden about in a blue linen coat with his head bare it would have been possible to forget that he was a young butcher. That sort of man made his way in the world, and if he could never be a gentleman himself he could give his children all the advantages that money could buy. No, there was nothing to complain of in Mr. Flitch's attitude towards life; but, oh, what a comedown it was that she should be expected to consider and advance the ambitions of such as he!

IX

The poor lady sat at the open window of her bedroom on that summer night, turning sadly over in her mind the years that were past, and wondering what the years that were coming would bring to her.

The room in which she sat spoke eloquently of the large secure outlook of her youth. It was the "best bedroom," sacred to the retirements of generations of its aristocratic owners. It had been her mother's room, and had seemed to fit her no less than it had fitted those who had used it before her. It reflected the dignity of the owner of such a house as this, and Miss Godbee had seemed to herself to be coming into her kingdom when she had taken to it after her mother's death. Now, all its spacious dignity seemed hollow to her, for the foundations on which her life had rested were cracking and parting.

As she looked out onto the trees and the grass, dimly seen in the moonless summer night, she could imagine them stretching away, down the slope, to merge themselves in the fields and woods of her girlhood. It was impossible to forget the streets that now covered those fields, for they had crept so close that it was never quiet, as once it had been. But she could put herself in the mood of make-believe, and the tears came into her eyes as she imagined herself still under the protection of her mother, so strong and capable, and so loving, too, to her only child, whose youth had been not less sheltered or cherished than that of the girls who had been her companions, nor less fortunate, living in this fine house, from which so many windows had opened upon vistas now closing. Oh, if only her mother had been alive, the trouble that she felt coming upon her would have been averted somehow. She was unequal to the burden, but she must go on shouldering it. She had had high hopes of the new departure that she was about to make, but in this hour of weakness her hopes fell to zero. She had missed her way; no turning that she could take would lead her back to the untroubled sunlit paths of her girlhood.

But no one would have suspected her of such faintings of heart, as, erect and self-contained, she met her new pupils at the beginning of the term.

Their numbers had come up to her expectations, although the two daughters of Mr. Brinton, who had been promised her, were not among them. She knew very well why. If Mr. Flitch's girls were not good enough for her, Mr. Brinton's weren't. She could read that statement between the

lines of the curt note in which Mr. Brinton informed her that he had changed his mind. She did not know whether other parents had been dissuaded from sending their daughters to her for the same reasons, though she had good reason to know that Mr. Flitch had taken the deepest offence at her refusal of his. No teaching, no credit. She had read *that* between the lines of the missive she had received from Messrs. Flitch & Son, enclosing her account, now much overdue, with a request for immediate payment in full.

The account was not very much overdue, and she settled it at once. But it did not do to think too much about how other outstanding bills were to be paid, and supplies obtained through the term that was coming.

X

It was difficult to say whether that mistake of Miss Godbee's with Mr. Flitch was the ultimate cause of her downfall, which was not very long delayed. It was certainly a contributory cause, but there were others which perhaps she would never have surmounted.

She put up a good fight. If she had not inherited her mother's enthusiasm for education, she was experienced enough to find the right teachers to run her school in the right way. She taught very little herself, but made an admirable figure-head, and when the parents of Oakfield were admitted on public occasions to the fine house, and greeted by the fine lady at the head of it, they could hardly fail to congratulate themselves on getting good value for their money, though there were those here and there who grumbled at the fees, which were more than twice as high as those of the High School at Elmstead, two miles away. Still, Oakfield House under Miss Godbee gave a cachet which the High School could not. Its old aroma hung faintly about it, and illustrious names were still in evidence on the printed matter supplied when asked for. Girls were sent from Elmstead, in spite of the convenient High School, and Miss Godbee's pupils were remarked for their ladylike manners and appearance. Perhaps the tradition of "fashionableness," which Miss Godbee had grafted onto the old tra-

ditions of Oakfield House, helped her now, where before it had hindered her.

Mr. Flitch made a great deal of commotion at first about the slight put upon him, and then suddenly ceased to make a commotion. Influence was probably brought to bear upon him by his elder daughters, who would not have wanted the slight emphasized; and Mr. Flitch may have thought that events were likely to justify his offence without influence of his brought to bear upon them. Besides, sympathy with him was not universal. There were some who said that Miss Godbee was quite right to keep her school select in that way, and she had a few pupils whom she would not have had otherwise. But to balance this approval there were sneers at the airs she gave herself. Her rejection of Mr. Flitch's girls was brought up against her at the beginning of every term, when she accepted other girls who by no conceivable standard could be counted as their superiors. And the people who sent their girls to her were made to feel, here and there, that it was they who were giving themselves airs.

And there was the damning fact of tradesmen's bills irregularly paid. Try as she would she could not keep the tide from rising, and the stigma of failure fastened itself upon her. She went very near to getting the numbers that would have made the new venture a success, but never quite attained to them, and there was no margin for fluctuations. On the first term in which new pupils failed to balance those who had left, the failure was known and exaggerated. After that she lost steadily, and the failure became real and apparent to everybody. But she kept her educational colours flying until the end, and no one had any cause of complaint against her on that score.

Finally, another turn of the screw was given to her holding of Oakfield House. She had long ceased to understand how she stood with mortgages, rates, road-making, and all the other charges that had increased beyond all bounds since her mother had left her her interest in the property. She had simply paid what had been demanded of her. And now, for some reason which her lawyers explained to her but she was incapable of following, she had to put down a large sum

of money to continue her tenancy. Even to get quit of it she would have to pay some hundreds of pounds. But get quit of it she must, for the other was out of the question. There was nothing for it but to sell all she possessed, and start the world again at the age of nearly sixty without a penny. Her ruin was complete.

XI

Oakfield House was sold, and Mr. Flitch bought it. The idea of doing so came to him suddenly, and almost took his breath away by its large boldness. The house he had lived in since riches had come to him suited him in every way; he would certainly have no use for the thirty bedrooms of Oakfield House, and the handsome range of reception rooms would answer no requirements that were likely to come into his life. No one, indeed, had supposed that the house would be bought for private occupation, for it was now quite unsuited to its surroundings. It might be put to some public use, or pulled down, and the land used for still more streets of little houses, which pay better than big ones.

But Mr. Flitch bought it to live in. Just that one house in all London, or in all England, would point for him his rise to fortune, and give it dignity. What would it matter that his friends and associates would laugh at him, and see nothing in his purchase of a house much too big for him but a desire to make a boastful splash with his money? He was without that desire, beyond the point where it showed itself in living well and driving good horses, for the ways of people much above the rank in life to which he had been brought up would be irksome to him. It was the hugging in secret the amazing vision of himself, John Flitch, living with his family in the house which in his youth had enshrined the lives of beings as much above him as the angels in heaven that drove him to the purchase in a hot glow of desire. It was his one chance of romance in life, his youthful passions abated, and nothing before him but what he had enjoyed for years past, and enjoyed still, but not with the eager anticipations of youth to salt it. It would be

something to end his days in Oakfield House, fallen though it was from its old estate. For him its ancient dignity still clung to it, and his youth would be renewed in imagination every day, when he could once call it his own.

XII

One summer evening, about a year after he had installed himself, Mr. Flitch was talking to Dudley Brinton, who was engaged to his eldest daughter.

Dudley Brinton was a Fellow of his college—a scholarly self-reliant young man, indistinguishable in appearance and manner from any other young Oxford don. Though he had raised himself in the social scale he gave himself no airs of superiority over his father's old friend, and it was not necessary, before him, to assume an irksome gentility, as was sometimes expected of Mr. Flitch with other young people whom his daughters invited to the house.

They were sitting together after dinner in the great dining-room, with its pillared recess and its three long windows open to the warm, gathering dusk. But for the occasional noise of the trams which climbed the rise past the gate, and the fainter sounds that came from the streets packed with houses lying all around them, it was not unlike the old days, when guests on such a night as this had said that it might be a hundred miles from London. Only trees and grass were to be seen from the windows under the fading sky. It was peaceful enough between the passings of the nearer trams; and the uneasy murmur of life from farther off seemed only to enhance the sense of seclusion.

"The girls want me to dress for dinner every night," Mr. Flitch was saying. "Well, I'm not going to, Dudley; and I'm not going to ask my old friends to, either, when they come and dine with me. And I'm not going to have dinner later than seven o'clock. That's when I'm ready for it, and that's when I've been accustomed to have it, ever since I've had late dinner at all. I'm not going to change all my habits at my time of life, just because I've come to live in a big house."

"I don't see why you should," said the young man. "And

I'm sure I don't know why anybody should object to dining at seven o'clock, if they get as good a dinner as you give them."

"Well, I hope they'll always get that, and a good glass of wine with it. I pride myself on that, and I've a right to. I don't believe there was ever better wine served at this table than's drunk at it now, even in the old days, though they may have been much higher people that drank it."

"I never heard that Miss Godbee was noted for the wine she gave her guests to drink."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of Miss Godbee, or Mrs. Godbee either, though she was a lady that might have lived in a house like this quite natural, even if she hadn't kept a school in it. You're not old enough to remember what Oakfield was like when Lord Tonbridge lived in this house. There are precious few people left in the place who do remember it. I should think most of the high nobility must have sat round this table—for I asked when I bought it, and found it's the one that's always been here. I can't never get quite used to it, Dudley—me being at home here, instead of people like that. It's the same rooms I'm living in, and some of the same furniture I'm using. Still, I don't want to ape their ways. It wasn't for that I bought Oakfield House, whatever people may say."

"I've told you, haven't I, that Robert Worsley, the son of the present Lord Tonbridge, was in my year at St. Michael's? He's a grandson of the one who sold this house. I asked him about it."

"That seems funny, that does—you being friends with him; and I suppose your grandfather would have come to the back door here, if he'd come to the house at all. It's where I used to come, and think myself lucky to have got the chance. I don't suppose there's many masters of houses like this know their back premises as well as I know mine. And here we are, drinking wine at Lord Tonbridge's table."

The young man laughed. "I told Worsley how it stood," he said. "I shouldn't have felt comfortable with him if I hadn't."

"Well, that's what I like about you, Dudley. Fill your

glass, my boy. I suppose you're as good as any of them at Oxford, but you're not ashamed of what you sprung from. No reason to be, either. I dare say if you went far enough back you'd find that Lord Tonbridge himself didn't come from anything higher. Some goes up in the world and some goes down, but you don't want no pretence about it. You'll go up, and my girls'll go up, and it'll be me and your father that have started you. Well, he's a man that had more education than I had to begin with, and perhaps he's a bit different; but I've got as high for myself as I want to, and I've no idea of putting myself where I can be looked down on."

"I think you're quite right, Mr. Flitch. And as for rising in the world, it ought not to be wholly a question of money. It isn't, at Oxford, thank goodness! Everybody gets his chance there. Very different from this place, when it was a school! I never heard of anything like the snobbishness of Miss Godbee refusing to take the girls."

"Ah, Miss Godbee!" said Mr. Flitch, reflectively. "Poor Miss Godbee!"

The young man seemed a little surprised at this relenting tone. "I believe if she hadn't refused to take your girls, and father hadn't refused to send his because of it, she might have made a success of the place after all," he said.

"I wonder if she would," said Mr. Flitch, in the same tone of leniency. "It's a queer thing to think of me living at Oakfield House, Dudley, and Miss Godbee in a couple of rooms in the Tonbridge almshouses. Who'd ever have thought in the old days that Miss Godbee would have come down to that?"

"I think she was lucky to get her nomination. Is it true that you worked it for her, Mr. Flitch?"

"Who told you that?" asked Mr. Flitch sharply. "It was after she got it that I was made a Governor."

"Yes, I know; but—well, if you did help her I think you showed a very forgiving spirit, after the way she'd treated you."

Mr. Flitch poured himself out another glass of wine, and sipped it reflectively. "She'd always held herself high," he said, "and she'd a right to. If you'd known what she was

like when she was a girl, younger than any of mine now—I remember her like that: and the other young ladies that came to school in this very house, a good half of them, I should say, belonging to the highest nobility—all happy and natural together, laughing and playing about the place, as I used to see them every day when I was young—I didn't like to think I'd helped to bring her down, Dudley. It was a shock to me when I heard that she'd leave Oakfield House without a penny to bless herself with. I didn't think no more of what had annoyed me with her when I heard that."

"Wasn't the high nobility business always a little exaggerated? I know it was made the most of; but if her friends had been chiefly among highly placed people when she was young, wouldn't they have helped her when she came to grief?"

"Ah, that's where you don't do her justice, Dudley. She wouldn't take a penny from them; at least, she wouldn't ask them. Mr. Horridge wanted to do it for her— Mind, I'm telling you this in confidence, as you seem to have heard something; it's not to go any further—but she wouldn't let him; made him promise that he wouldn't. I wouldn't have given the promise myself, but he's weak—Horridge. She'd take the nomination if he could get it for her. She'd lived and worked in Oakfield all her life, and thought she was entitled to apply for the benefits. That's how she put it. She's proud, and I respect her for it. Yes, I do. Oakfield was a very different place when she first came here to what it is now, but she was at the top of the tree even then. Now she's at the bottom. Most people would have asked for anything but that. But she's lived all her life here, and what she always was she is now, and knows it."

"Was it through Mr. Horridge that she got in?"

"Well, I suppose you know it wasn't. He wrote to Lord Tonbridge for one of his nominations, but they were both promised. Whatever I did in the way of talking to friends who had a pull—well, I asked that it shouldn't go no further, and I don't want it said I had anything to do with it. *She* wouldn't like it."

"I don't know that it would do her any harm to know

that you had heaped coals of fire on her head in that way. They say she holds her head as high as ever."

"High!" Mr. Flitch began to laugh, and when he had once begun he went on, so that presently Dudley laughed too, and asked him what the joke was.

Mr. Flitch sobered himself a little, and wiped his eyes. "Well, if you'll never let out to a living soul!" he said. "It's too good to keep to myself, but it's not to go beyond you, Dudley. I was in the shop here the other day. I don't often bother myself about it; somehow, since I come to live at Oakfield House I'm not so keen on the shop here. Getting a bit too big for my boots, I suppose. They were all kowtowing to me, as if I'd never cut up a sheep in my life, when in walks Miss Godbee. 'Oh, Mr. Flitch,' she says, when she sees me there, as cool and superior as you please, but quite polite, 'I have been continually complaining of the quality of the meat sent to me since I went to live in the almshouses. I pay the same price as before and ought to have the same attention. Yesterday I ordered a cutlet and was sent nothing but a piece of scrag. I shall be obliged if you will look into it.'"

Here Mr. Flitch interrupted his narrative to laugh again.

"She walks out with her head in the air," he continued, "not as if she'd scored off me particularly, you understand, but just in her ordinary way—a lady who's had a complaint to make to one of her tradesmen, and when she's made it she's finished with him. Oh, it was rich! There stood I with my hat in my hand—it had come off my head somehow—and just for all the world as if the old lady—her mother—had come into the shop thirty or forty years ago, and we trembling in our shoes for fear of losing her custom. That's blood, Dudley. Blood. She's got it, and I haven't, though I'm the master of Oakfield House and she's come down to an almshouse."

"Well, perhaps it is," said the young man, "though some people might call it something else. Was there anything in her complaint?"

"Ah! I looked into that. I turned round and found 'em sniggering. That made me furious somehow. I didn't speak to *them* with my hat in my hand. 'If ever I hear

of you serving that lady with anything but the best,' I said, 'out you go—the whole pack of you.' Oh, I gave it 'em straight. They weren't sniggering when I done with them, I can tell you that."

Mr. Flitch rose from his seat.

"Well, we'd beter go into the other room," he said. "Jessie won't thank me for keeping you here talking. Miss Godbee! I wonder how many times she's gone through this door laughing and happy. Just switch off the light, my boy."

IN A STRANGE LAND¹

By W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

(From *Nash's Magazine* and *The Cosmopolitan*)

I AM of a roving disposition, but I travel not to see imposing monuments, which indeed somewhat bore me, nor beautiful scenery, of which too soon I tire; I travel to see men. And I avoid the great. I would not cross the road to meet a president or a king; I am content to know the writer in the pages of his book and the painter in his picture; but I have journeyed a hundred leagues to see a missionary of whom I have heard a strange story, and I have spent a fortnight in a vile hotel in order to improve my acquaintance with a billiard-marker.

I should be inclined to say that I am not surprised to meet any sort of person were it not that there is one sort which never fails to give me a little shock of amused astonishment. This is the elderly Englishwoman, generally of adequate means, who is to be found living alone in the most unexpected places. You do not wonder when you hear of her living in a villa on a hill outside a small Italian town, the only Englishwoman in the neighbourhood, and you are almost prepared for it when a lonely *hacienda* is pointed out to you in Andalusia and you are told that in it has dwelt for many years an English lady. But it is more surprising when you hear that the only white person in a Chinese city is an Englishwoman, not a missionary, who lives there none knows why; and you are completely at a loss to explain why another should inhabit an island in the South Seas, and a third a bungalow on the outskirts of a large village in Java.

They live solitary lives, without friends, and they do not welcome the stranger. Though they may not have seen one of their own race they will pass you on the road as though they did not see you, and if, presuming on your nationality, you should call as likely as not they will decline to receive you; but if they do they will give you a cup

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of tea from a silver teapot and on a plate of old Worcester you will find Scotch scones. They will talk to you politely, as though they were entertaining you in a Kentish vicarage, but when you take your leave will show no particular desire to continue the acquaintance. One wonders in vain what strange instinct it is that has driven them to separate themselves from their kith and kin and thus to live apart from all their natural interests in an alien land.

But of all these Englishwomen whom I have met or perhaps only heard of, the one who remains most vividly in my memory is an elderly person who lived in Asia Minor. I had arrived after a tedious journey at a little town from which I proposed to make the ascent of a celebrated mountain, and I was taken to a rambling hotel that stood at its foot. I arrived late at night and signed my name in the book. I went up to my room. It was cold and I shivered as I undressed, but in a moment there was a knock at the door and the dragoman came in.

"Signora Niccolini's compliments." To my astonishment he handed me a hot-water bottle. I took it with grateful hands.

"Who is Signora Niccolini?" I asked.

"She is the proprietor of this hotel," he answered.

I sent her my thanks and he withdrew. The last thing I expected in a scrubby little hotel in Asia Minor kept by an old Italian woman was a beautiful hot-water bottle. There is nothing I like more, and next morning, in order to thank her in person, I asked if I might see the Signora Niccolini. In a moment she came in. She was a little stout woman, not without dignity, and she wore a black apron trimmed with lace and a small black lace cap. She stood with her hands crossed. I was astonished at her appearance, for she looked exactly like a housekeeper in a great English house.

"Did you wish to speak to me, sir?" she asked.

She was an Englishwoman and she had a cockney accent!

"I wanted to thank you for the hot-water bottle," I replied in some confusion.

"I saw by the visitors' book that you were English, sir, and I always send up a 'ot-water bottle to English gentlemen. Is there anything else, sir?"

"Not at the moment, thank you."

She gave me a polite little nod and withdrew. It was not easy to make her acquaintance, for she knew her place, as she would herself have put it, and she kept me at a distance. But I was persistent and I induced her at last to ask me to have a cup of tea in her own little parlour.

I learned that she had been lady's maid to a certain Lady Ormskirk, and Signor Niccolini—for she never alluded to her deceased husband in any other way—had been his lordship's chef. Signor Niccolini was a very handsome man and for some years there had been an "understanding" between them. When they had both saved a certain amount of money they were married, retired from service and looked about for an hotel. They had bought this one on an advertisement because Signor Niccolini thought he would like to see something of the world. That was nearly thirty years ago and Signor Niccolini had been dead for fifteen. His widow had never been back to England. I asked her if she was not homesick.

"I don't say as I wouldn't like to go back on a visit, though I expect I'd find many changes. But my family didn't like the idea of me marrying a foreigner and I 'aven't spoken to them since. Of course there are many things here that are not the same as they are at 'ome, but it's surprising what you get used to. I see a lot of life. I don't know as I should care to live the 'umdrum life they do in places like London."

It was extraordinary that she could have lived for thirty years in this wild and almost barbaric country without its having touched her. Though I knew no Turkish and she spoke it with ease, I was convinced that she spoke it most incorrectly and with a cockney accent. I suppose she had remained the precise, prim English lady's maid, knowing her place, through all these vicissitudes because she had no faculty of surprise. She took everything that came as a matter of course. She looked upon everyone who wasn't English as a foreigner and therefore as someone almost imbecile, for whom allowances must be made. She ruled her staff despotically (for did she not know how an upper servant in a great house should exercise his authority over the

under servant?) and everything about the hotel was clean and neat.

"I do my best," she said, when I congratulated her on this. "Of course, one can't expect foreigners to 'ave the same ideas that we 'ave, but as his lordship used to say to me, 'What we've got to do, Parker,' he said to me, 'what we've got to do in this life is to make the best of our raw material.'"

But she kept her greatest surprise for the eve of my departure. "I'm glad you're not going before you've seen my two sons. They've been away on business, but they've just come back. You'll be surprised when you see them. I've trained them with my own 'ands, so to speak, and when I'm gone they'll carry on the 'otel between them."

In a moment two tall, swarthy, strapping young fellows entered. Her eyes lighted up with pleasure. They took her in their arms and gave her resounding kisses.

I shook hands with the pair and then Signora Niccolini said something to them and they went away.

"They're handsome fellows, Signora," I said. "You must be very proud of them."

"I am, sir, and they're good boys, both of them. They've never given me a moment's trouble since they was born and they're the very image of Signor Niccolini."

"I must say no one would think they had an English mother."

"I'm not exactly their mother, sir. I've just sent them along to say 'ow do you do to 'er."

I daresay I looked a little confused.

"They're the sons that Signor Niccolini 'ad by a Greek girl that used to work in the 'otel, and 'aving no children of me own I adopted them."

I sought for some remark to make.

"I 'ope you don't think that any blame attaches to Signor Niccolini," she said, drawing herself up a little. "I shouldn't like you to think that, sir." She folded her hands again and with a mixture of pride and satisfaction added the final word:

"Signor Niccolini was a very full-blooded man."

WE WERE JUST SAYING¹

By VIOLA MEYNELL

(From *Time and Tide*)

WHEN Laura Meryon left school and began life at home, she was not so much remarkable for the erudition which might have been expected from a young lady so fresh from her studies as for her charming behaviour to everyone. Her convent-schools, first in England and then abroad, had perhaps not initiated her into the more advanced branches of learning, but had certainly imparted a whole curriculum of considerate ways and gay, gentle behaviour. She made a curiously slight and yet sweet presence in the house—slight with the self-bestowed insignificance of one who is always making others important, and gay with the gaiety of children and nuns.

She listened to many things strange to her from her mother's lips. Gossip in regard to friends, servants, grievances, triumphs, elderly admirers—or rather, admirers whose taste was mature and choice—seemed somehow not quite for her convent ears, or at any rate not in that hard and rapid flow of her mother's style. But Laura was far too admiring and enthusiastic not to identify herself with these interests. She admired everyone. She was even unable not to find charm and glamour in the deaf cousin who had been living for the last year with her mother, and who now, with the advent of Laura, felt as if she had stepped part way out of her cavern of silence, so consistently did Laura address her in a way she could hear—and with that gaiety which rarely accompanied the grudging remarks meted out to Bertha Coombe. Laura indeed so obliterated people's drawbacks in her chivalrous and enthusiastic estimate of them, that it was as if they existed not; and she could not have admitted their defects even to herself without the

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greatest reluctance and embarrassment. Every act and inflection of hers denied that Bertha Coombe was deaf at all. Should she be alone with Bertha, and drop the poker with a clatter on the hearth, she would not omit to utter a quick, nervous apology, though neither it nor the noisy clatter could be heard by her cousin.

Soon after Laura's return from school, Mr. William Hewett came to lunch. An arrangement was being made between himself and Mrs. Meryon for the transference of Bertha Coombe from her household to his. It was a change ardently advocated by Mrs. Meryon. Now that her daughter was back from school, and she was no longer alone, there was no vestige of benefit to be derived from Bertha's presence; it was on the contrary an intolerable burden.

As Laura accompanied Mr. Hewett to the front door upon his departure, he wished it was she that he was to take into his household, to leaven a family life that somehow had none of the charm she seemed to disseminate. Lost in the contemplation of that happy face framed in dark curls, he fumbled lengthily with his preparations at the door, his hand passing without recognition several times over the familiar handle of his stick as he groped for it in the stand.

"And how do you like leaving school?" he asked. "Not very sorry, I'll be bound."

"Oh yes, I was dreadfully sorry to leave," said Laura, "but—oh, it's so lovely to be at home!"

"Yes. So now a new chapter begins, and it'll be nothing but dances and theatres and bouquets and boxes of chocolates," said Mr. Hewett. "I don't think you're going to have a very dull time, young lady, by the look of you."

"Well, I hope not," she confessed, her eyes shining with pleasure.

"Ah! And I seem to hear the sound of wedding-bells in the near distance," said Mr. Hewett, pretending to listen.

"Oh no!" she cried bashfully, and scolding him in a way he found delightful. "You don't hear them at all!—Or if you did hear them it would be in the very farthest distance!"

"Ah, I see. You mean to break a few hearts first. Well, enjoy your young life while you can, my dear," he pressed

her,—as if he would thus be relieved of some regrets on his own account. “Now’s the time for pleasure, while you’re young. No troubles or cares for you now—they all come later on.” He found it extraordinarily pleasant to dwell on the thought of this young life without cares or disappointments, a charming gay young life, with nothing but enjoyment for its lot. “Get all you can out of it, my dear,” he adjured her. “We don’t have so very long to live, you know. And we’ll be a long time dead.”

He went out into the cold street, his heart still warmed by the air of happy service with which she had helped him on with his coat, and by the bright vision she afforded of a sorrow-free existence. And Laura went back to the drawing-room with so light a heart that she almost danced down the passage, to think that she was at a time of life immune from care, that nothing but joy was the portion of her youth, and that she would need to be as old as Mr. Hewett before she really knew what it was to be susceptible to pain and grief.

Entering the drawing-room, she saw that her mother, who rarely read, had in the few minutes since the visitor left become deeply absorbed in a book, which she held close before her face. Bertha Coombe sat on the other side of the fireplace. She looked thirty-four or five, and had at the moment an alert air of willingness to respond to any form of social overture that might be made to her, or as if at the slightest opportunity she would make one herself. Her chained *pince-nez* were very prominent in her unremarkable face, and as she was deaf and not blind one thought of them vaguely as attached rather to her hearing than to her sight.

Mrs. Meryon’s intense absorption in her book was relaxed as soon as Laura came and sat between her and the deaf woman. Laura felt a strange misgiving as she saw her mother abandon her pretence of reading. It was nearly three o’clock, and Bertha Coombe habitually took a walk at three. It was somehow to be hoped most urgently that the burst of conversation which was imminent from Mrs. Meryon would be postponed till then.

Surely Bertha would not stay at home on account of the

threatening weather. Most likely, she would at any rate prepare to go out, not noticing what black clouds were spreading up from the north and how they threatened hail and sleet shortly. But Bertha Coombe, as it happened, was just in a mood of almost sprightly observation of everything. She did not even have to go to the window to discover the dull inclemency of the weather; she realised it with alert vivacity from her chair by the fire, and three o'clock came and went and she did not stir.

Mrs. Meryon began to speak.

"We've really got rid of her, it seems," she said, her eyes on her book, as if she was still reading.

"*Oh, Mother! Hush!*"

"Why hush?" Mrs. Meryon asked, almost startled by the intensity of Laura's tone.

"Because—because she's so close," said Laura in a whisper, as she bent her head.

"Now, Laura, you know perfectly well the foolishness of what you're saying," said her mother, in a deliberately distinct voice. "Now that you're growing up why do you behave like a child? You know as well as I do that as far as hearing is concerned, it's as if Bertha was sitting not in that chair there but as far away as Timbuctoo." She stopped, but merely for one of those full little pauses that did not even suggest that she had finished. "What I mind when you say a thing like that is not so much the utter foolishness of it as the suggestion that I would be willing to inflict pain. I should have thought you would know that the last thing I am capable of is to risk hurting anyone's feelings. And considering that there's no question of that, I don't think it's very nice of you to accuse me of it."

"Oh no, mother! I know, of course, and yet—oh please, please, mother—"

She gave one glance at Bertha, who caught her eye with an expectant look, thinking she was about to be spoken to. But Laura could only fail her and bend her head in embarrassment. She suddenly found herself in acute misery and discomfort. Where was the immunity of youth that had sped so gaily down the passage with her but a few moments ago? Here already, without any visible change,

without anything seeming to have happened, it had deserted her.

"You've had none of the trouble of Bertha," said Mrs. Meryon, "so you can afford to indulge in those fanciful ideas. No one knows how heavily the weight of making these arrangements has fallen on me, and so I think I might be allowed to be pleased at having really managed to get rid of her. It went off very well. Mr. Hewett had already said he was willing to have her, provided he liked her after a meeting. And the relationship is quite as close on his side as on ours; so as I've done my duty for a year it's time he did his."

"Oh hush! She's so close. She may not hear, but she's so close, she's touching me!" Laura implored her mother beneath her voice.

Bertha Coombe sat slightly forward in her chair, not exactly smiling, but exceedingly ready to smile. Deprived of her walk, she was prepared to take her distraction in the form of a little delightful conversation. The idlest comment—how delightful would it be to her, like good news to another! A little confidence about the housekeeping, any remark on neighbours' affairs, any little bit of information about the visitor who had just gone, an exclamation about the weather, she was so ready to hear, and would answer just exactly in the way that would best agree with the speaker's views. Surely the pleasure of being so entirely agreed with would compensate anyone for the trouble of having to speak loud. It was not unreasonable to hope that a little conversation might now take place, and be even a pleasure all round.

She could not honestly expect somehow that the desired opening would be made by Mrs. Meryon. But Laura might at any moment begin a conversation. And not only did she find little things to say on her own account, but she reported the remarks of others, a great boon, suddenly letting in light on darkness as she bent close, and not too close, and said in her clear young voice:

"We were just saying . . ." She was the chief sound that life had.

The door was opened by a maid.

"Mrs. Edwards," she announced, and the visitor came and sat among them, while Mrs. Meryon greedily welcomed her. Bertha Coombe leaned a little more forward in her chair with a look of gratified participation in the arrival of the visitor and of anything that might ensue.

"I've just been remarking," said Mrs. Meryon, after a little talk, "on the fact that we're going to be entirely relieved of the presence of a certain person sitting on your right. She's going."

"Who! Oh, I see what you mean. But—she can't hear?" Mrs. Edwards asked nervously.

"Not a word."

"You're sure?"

"Sure? Yes, I think I ought to know how deaf she is—I've had ample opportunity of knowing. My lady has seen to it, indeed, that I shouldn't make any mistake. This that I am going to tell you is only one little detail of all the trying things I've had to endure from her for a year. In my efforts to make her hear I've sometimes shouted myself ill almost, and she's drawn back as if I hurt her, and said that I didn't need to shout so loud. So I've not only not had to speak too low, if you please, but not too loud either. I've been supposed to know exactly the pitch of voice required. You'd think that to be spoken to at all they'd take as a favour. That's only one little thing;—I do assure you that altogether it's been a martyrdom."

As they spoke, Bertha Coombe turned slightly from one to the other, with an invitation that was yet purged of all claim.

"I never realised she was so difficult," said Mrs. Edwards.

"No, no one has realised it," sighed Mrs. Meryon, "and certainly not Bertha herself. You'd think they'd be a little diffident, to make up for the trouble they give;—but no. For instance, her appetite. She eats as much as anyone making full use of their faculties. I have never grudged anyone anything in my life, but one can't help observing. Laura may think I exaggerate, but as she has only just come home she can't know very much about it. The other day, before Laura came, the cook happened to send up three pieces of chicken in the little casserole at luncheon,

and when Bertha and I had each had one I offered her the last piece. She took it. I'm not complaining,—I didn't mind in the least . . .”

“Impossible! Surely she didn't know there was no more!”

“She made no attempt to know! As I say, I didn't mind, I didn't want it in the least; I'm entirely indifferent to such things. But I thought it curious.”

The feeling revived in the relation of this incident made a very pronounced expression on Mrs. Meryon's face, and Mrs. Edwards showed a corresponding degree of shocked incredulity, which made Bertha Coombe watch them with pleasurable eagerness, thinking that something of such an arresting affair was bound to reach her.

“She has one great disadvantage which weighs on one's mind too,” continued Mrs. Meryon, encouraged by her friend's sympathy; “but it's something she knows nothing about, so one naturally doesn't expect any consideration from her on that account. It's something very painful in her history that she's never been told, something that's supposed not to be talked about in case it should ever get round to her, but it wouldn't matter your knowing.”

“You don't mean it!” said Mrs. Edwards, hardly able to refrain from a long curious examination of Bertha in this new aspect—as if it were possible to look, as well as speak, with impunity. But, remembering otherwise, she managed to keep her eyes away from Bertha, and to fix them on Mrs. Meryon in expectation of the revelation she was about to hear.

“Oh, if something would stop her!—if something would stop her before she says another word! Oh mother, take care, take care!” Laura cried inwardly, pressing her hands together in a misery of apprehension.

“It's one of the most horrible stories,” said Mrs. Meryon. “I was really quite afraid to have her here, in case the sight of her should perpetually remind me of it. Her mother practically killed her father.”

“Killed! Do you mean it? And she doesn't know! Oh, but take care then!” whispered Mrs. Edwards, her scruples aroused once more.

"It's quite all right, she can't hear a word. I'll tell you the whole story—"

"Here? Now?" asked Mrs. Edwards, still half-uneasy.

"Why not? We're talking about the *soufflé* we had at lunch, or about my new costume, for all she knows. Or—look! I'm showing you something highly interesting in my book," she said, unable to repress a smile at her idea. She leaned over, and with great over-emphasis pretended to be showing her friend something in the book that was still in her hand.

"Well," she resumed, "Bertha was a child away at school when it happened. Her mother was deaf—as deaf as she is. She had become so gradually. Just as Bertha has done. The father was my cousin, and a most charming man. Being very good-looking and popular, you can imagine what a drag on him his wife must have become, especially as she was madly devoted to him. They lived in a tiny old-fashioned house in Chelsea. Their maid fell ill and went to hospital; and Leslie, my cousin, so as to be out of the way of the discomfort and upset, was to go and stay for a few days with some friends. On the day he was to go, his wife suddenly found him disappeared. She thought he had gone without saying good-bye, as he sometimes did after a quarrel, and she admitted there had been a scene that morning. But do you know what had happened really?"

"Mother! Stop!" implored Laura silently.

Bertha made a little hopeful movement. Such entranced glances!—surely this must be something she would be told. But however urgent and important it might seem, she must not ask—she had learnt that. People never liked it. Something was interesting them, rushing through their minds at its own pace, and they never liked it if everything had to be stopped and brought to a standstill while they communicated it to her. The only hope was to discover later, though how rarely this succeeded!—For people were generally unable to recall what they had been speaking of, even though it had looked on their faces at the time almost as if it must be a matter of life and death to them.

"What happened really," Mrs. Meryon went on, "was that just as he was ready to go, my cousin went to fetch

a bottle of his special wine to take with him. It was kept in a large, dark closet that led out of the sitting-room down two or three steps. While he was there the door must have blown shut and, as it slammed, the outside bolt fell and he was fastened in.

"All that day, and the days that followed, his wife was sitting in that room, eating, reading, amusing herself, while a few yards away from her he was shouting and knocking and struggling for his life. He must have heard every movement of hers, just the other side of the door, but however much he might shout she just calmly went on with what she was doing, and let the husband she was supposed to love call and shout to her to save his life!"

"You mean she couldn't hear!" her friend broke in.

"Not a sound! Only you'd think some instinct might have told her, considering he was only two or three feet away from her. Later, when he was missed, a search was made and he was found, but he died of exhaustion as they picked him up. When his wife knew what she had done, she got into such a state that no one could do anything for her. She couldn't get over it. The thought of it must have haunted her day and night. She hardly spoke, and she never seemed more than half alive after that. I used to see her sometimes, but she died a few years later. Her closest relations decided that Bertha should never be told what had happened. She was growing deaf herself, and they thought it might prey on her mind. They may have decided rightly,—I don't know."

Bertha Coombe looked from one to the other in her docile, inevitable patience. No, she must not interrupt and ask them—it did not do. And yet could she not ask Laura? With one who was so willing and responsive it was different, it was possible. Laura had a way of seeming even pleased to be put to some little trouble. As unnoticeably as possible, Bertha spoke to her:

"What is it they are saying? Something very interesting, I know! I couldn't quite hear. What are they talking about, dear?"

"We were just saying," began Laura, bending down with her usual smiling readiness, "we were just saying . . ."

THE LION'S DEN¹

By RAYMOND MORTIMER

(From *The London Mercury*)

IT was just three months after Marlow's death, when I heard who had taken Well House, or, more accurately, when I realised that the Crawley who had taken it was Walter Crawley, *the* Walter Crawley. I had just started to edit Marlow's Letters, and the literary paper in which my request for any letters that might be useful to me appeared contained a paragraph to the effect that Mr. Walter Crawley's enormous and appreciative public would be interested to hear that he had taken Well House, Wells, where Horace Marlow had lived for the last thirty years of his life.

Crawley went up to Oxford the same year as I did, and I saw a good deal of him there. He had a natural genius for success, and he then wanted to succeed with the sort of person it is worth succeeding with. He never tried for any public achievement or position, in the Union, for instance, but those who knew him thought him heads taller intellectually than any other man up, and predicted for him every predictable distinction. Since then I had not seen him, but I could not remain ignorant any more than any of my fellow-sufferers from the ineptitude of publishers' puffs, of his subsequent prominent, but, to my sense, so depressingly downward career. A first novel, too brilliant with the hard promising brilliance of youth, then a second, less brilliant without being more honest, and then a succession of increasingly popular, unreal and ill-written books—such would have been all his public performance, if his publishers had not conspired with copy-seeking journalists to effect a constant and cruel impingement upon what the man should have regarded as his privacy, and to stimulate

¹ Copyright, 1924, by Raymond Mortimer.

his readers' appetite with details of his recreations, his relatives, his political opinions and his continually photographed appearance. With each of these his wife had apparently a tremendous deal to do. I disliked the whole idea of them in any case, but it was having this idea jammed so close under my nose which I really resented—the grossly popular and penetrating scent of it in the very place where I had grown to count upon such a different and subtle exhalation. I should have found the presence of anyone else in Marlow's house discordant, but Crawley's being a writer, and a successful one too, made *his* presence particularly painful, and, if you will allow the word, pathetic.

It is not true that my admiration of Marlow and my grief at his death were affecting my nerves, but my duty of editing his letters certainly kept his image before me, audible and fragrant and intensely alive. It was prevented from settling and solidifying into a cold fixed impression by the unobserved gestures and unguessed-at motions of his mind, which were now being revealed to me, and above all by the view of the formation, in years before I knew him, of the character and genius which he had so intentionally built up for himself. It was this conscious cultivation of particular sensibilities in himself that made his achievements possible, and they were great and high and beautiful. The seventeen novels and sixty or so tales that he wrote are as distinguished as anything in the language. His work is incomparably fine, in the French sense. Not a shade, not the shadow of a shade, escaped him; he would pin down and imprison his ever so clearly captured meaning with the untrustingness of the scientist; otherwise, he said, a new aspect could escape as quickly as a new butterfly or a new gas. Of course, this exquisite treatment did not win popularity for his books. Critics admired his work from a distance, and cautiously praised it, without presuming to invade the *coulisses* to examine the marvelous means employed, the affectionately contrived approach to the subject, the passionately artful presentation, and the rest of the religiously elaborate technique. The public, caring even less about form, does not recognise the power which it has, when prop-

erly handled, of making new, true and valuable revelations; so that Marlow's books are read little, and appreciated less.

No one could conceivably like both Marlow's and Crawley's books. I was now going to see whether it was equally impossible, for me at any rate, to like both the men; for a natural cowardly dislike of rudeness would force me to call upon Crawley. So about a fortnight after his arrival I rang the bell of the beautiful eighteenth century house, in which Marlow had so properly encased, or better, I affectionately felt, enshrined his later life. As I waited for an answer, I considered the calm contented look of the house, the restrained and admirable appearance given it by the quality of the bricks and the perfect proportions of its front, carefully unadorned save by two urns and the delicately treated doorway. Almost the only alteration which the fabric had needed was the restoration of panes which Marlow had hastened to effect in place of the hideous plate glass he had found in the windows.

At last I heard steps, the door opened, and a tall, fair, bright-looking woman appeared.

"Mrs. Crawley?" I murmured, more as a definite summing up and labelling of her for my own benefit, than as a real enquiry. She was too obviously, too aggressively, the mistress of the house to declare herself such with more than the least of perceptible nods.

"You have come about the pianola," she declared, and before I could dare to dispute the fact, "Mr. Crawley and the gardener," she went on, "are helping your man to carry it upstairs. Why didn't you put a couple of men on the job?"

"I'm not, and I haven't, and I couldn't," I obscurely answered; then pulling my wits together, "I just called, in case your husband was free, to see him."

"Oh! an interviewer!" she shot out, never at a loss. "I am afraid Mr. Crawley can't possibly see you. I'm very sorry. You see we are not properly into the house yet. It belonged to Marlow, you know."

I felt that I must make quite clear this time who I was, before having to disappoint her again. "No, I live in Wells, and I came hoping your husband would not have forgotten

me beyond all possibility of being reminded of me again. We were at the House together. My name is Arthur Mallett, Mrs. Crawley."

As I finished my embarrassed explanation, Crawley swung round the stairs. I recognised him at once, as vigorous as ever, but wearing an easy-going expression at the same time, and looking ten years younger than his, and my, age.

"This is Mr. Mallock who says he was at Oxford with you, Walter. He tells me he is a neighbour of ours here," Mrs. Crawley explained, managing to put him *au fait*, without putting me at my ease.

"Mallock? Yes, of course, Mallett, Arthur Mallett. How are you? It is fine seeing you again." He seemed clearly and really pleased to see me. He turned to his wife, "Mr. Mallett is writing Marlow's Life, you know."

"How splendid, and what a privilege!" The change in her tone showed that she had not associated my name with the book, but that she decidedly saw the difference it made. "I hope we shall see a lot of you, Mr. Mallett," she resumed, "but I fear our presence here at all must seem almost sacrilegious to you. Of course, I adore Marlow; I am always trying to convert Walter." It was clear that she had never known Marlow.

"I had better confess at once that I can't read him," said Crawley.

"You mean that you haven't and don't," his wife took him up brightly, "but you have got to now; you will write all the better for it, won't he, Mr. Mallock?"

"I dare not say that," was all that I could awkwardly muster. There was a pause, and then I asked how they liked the house.

"Very much indeed," Crawley said. "It is just what we have been looking for. My wife found it."

"Yes," she broke in. "It is so nice its having such a literary tradition. Mrs. Alastair Wale was terribly keen to have it, but we got it first. I hear that she is simply furious."

"It would have been a gorgeous advertisement for her," I said with a bitterness that escaped them. Mrs. Wale

was Crawley's principal rival, and I was disgusted by the idea of the sordid beastly struggle over what was left of the dead Lion, the *réclame* that might be won from living in his old den. There was another pause, and then they started to lead me round the sweetly, and yet so bitterly familiar house.

I was again completely captured by it, not brutally bowled over by any sumptuous swaggering adornment, nor even forced to a chivalrous surrender by some particular and single exquisite or unexpected effect; it was a gentle invasion that I felt—less than that, a gentle pressure by the delicate discretion and unassuming genuineness which made up for it such an individual character; there was a general spontaneous look about it, as if everything was there naturally, as if everything beautifully belonged there, and at the same time there was nothing, I always felt, which was not deeply and patiently premeditated. There was little of especial rareness or value, except a few pictures; the house was not in the least a "show-place"; it just reflected, or rather, reinforced, the altogether *génial* personality of its former owner. The present inhabitants had taken it on furnished, just as it was, and hardly anything was changed. There was a new profusion of silver vases and of flowers in the Empire drawing-room—the room for which Marlow had chosen the exigencies of pure "period" decoration in preference to the pleasant, but not too aggressively English comfort which a discreet mixture of the styles was everywhere else made to produce. On the top of the piano a dozen or more photographs signed by notable persons were now alarmingly arrayed, and in the middle of the room, hugely, helplessly, almost shamefacedly, a piano-playing contrivance.

"My husband likes me to play to him while he works," Mrs. Crawley explained with a smile of satisfaction that would have won the heart of the interviewer who I had so provokingly turned out not to be.

In the next room nothing was new except two glass-fronted shelves of elaborately bound books. "The collected Marlow, and all my husband's books; I think he ought to start a collected edition, don't you, Mr. Mallett?"

"Of course," I said; I was glad to escape from that room. I had spent too many and too unforgettable evenings in it, and eighteen out of the twenty volumes of "the collected Marlow" had been written there.

"We have had great discussions about the house," Mrs. Crawley resumed, "I wanted to bring some of our own things down, and put some of these away, but Walter would not hear of it. I dare say he was right, it wouldn't really be worth the trouble, and Mr. Marlow's taste was wonderfully good, don't you think, on the whole? So we have agreed to leave the house just as it is, but I am to have a free hand in the garden. That has been terribly neglected."

"Really?"

"Oh! It has been kept carefully in order, I know; what I mean is the amount of opportunities they have missed. There isn't a flower in it except some flowering things on the walls. I have a tremendous scheme for putting a rose-garden in the middle of the big lawn."

Five minutes later I had escaped, and was helplessly nursing my bruised consciousness of the new order, *disorder* I vindictively felt, to which I should have to adapt myself. Crawley had given me little chance to sketch even his broad lines to myself; was that intentional, I wondered, was he a little gracefully ashamed of the declension he represented from his predecessor at Well House, or even from himself as I had known him twenty-five years earlier? Or was he just blessedly careless of me, and obtuse to the possibility of my comparisons? Until he emerged from this obscurity I could not see his wife properly either. The side she had shown, the show-side, was blindingly clear, I wanted to turn my eyes from the violence of it; but how did she affect him? and he her, if indeed he did? So that even to place her to my satisfaction, I was dependent on his admitting me at any rate one step nearer to his confidence. But what, I found myself wondering, would Marlow have made of them?

A few days later my work on the Letters took me to London for a week. When I returned, I found that the Crawleys had called, and the next day I started for Well House. Ten minutes from the door, I met Mrs. Crawley in a

pony-trap. My first thought was not to tell her where I was going; I should then be sure to find her husband alone. But she quickly made that impossible.

"How do you do, Mr. Mallett? We were so sorry to miss you the other day. I wish I could ask you to go and have some tea with Walter now. But he is working tremendously hard, and I dare not disturb him. And I am just off to pay a call myself."

"I was off to call, too—on you. But I'll come another day. How's the house?"

"Well, I've got quite used to it, but then I spend most of my time in the garden. My husband does not feel a bit at home yet, but that doesn't interfere with his work at all, I am glad to say. His brightest book was written in London during the foggiest month that I can remember. Still, he is terribly susceptible to atmosphere; don't you think all artists are? So the moment I saw this house I set my heart on it, and here we are. You know, Mr. Mallett, whenever I have to make any decision about a house or anything of that sort that might affect his work, I get terribly worried. It's a great privilege, of course, but such a responsibility, isn't it? His last book is in its seventieth thousand, you know."

"Wonderful."

"But he deserves it," she went on, "you can't imagine the number of letters he gets from people he has never heard of. Why, about his last book alone he is still getting three or four a day. They almost all want to ask him about the Dean in it; what did you think of him?"

"I don't think I quite remember." This was weak.

"You must. Haven't you read Walter's last book?" she quickly asked.

I took a long breath. "I have only read his first, I am afraid, Mrs. Crawley." She looked so much taken aback that I went on very untruthfully, "I read hardly any novels."

"But everyone reads Walter's." Then sharply, almost anxiously, "Didn't Marlow?"

"Oh! yes, some of them, I'm sure."

"She clutched at this, in spite of my two last trans-

parently disingenuous words, "Well, don't you think you ought to, too?"

"I must now," I evaded, in the hope that the horrid passage was over.

"Of course you must," she was breezy. "And they'll do you good. They do everyone good. I don't know what you will think though of my saying all this about my own husband. I simply can't help it. Yes, do come to see us soon, Mr. Mallock, and talk to us about Marlow. I'm told you think of nothing else, but I'm sure that's not true. Yes, very well. I'll tell my husband. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," I answered, as she capably drove away.

My interest in Mrs. Crawley, and my horror of her, were growing. She had shed some more light this time. She still talked as if I were connected with the Press, from habit perhaps, or she may have thought I could drag her miserable husband by the ears into my introduction to the Letters; but now it was her sincerity which appalled me. She did not like her husband's books for his sake, she liked him for theirs. They had been married for twenty years, she had told me, hadn't she ever seen the man himself? She was stage-struck, struck with the character and appearance of the author, the successful and, *par conséquent*, great author. She still looked at him from where the public sat, in fact she was the public, solidly and awfully incarnated. I could not yet see round her husband, but I was beginning quite absurdly to want to.

A fortnight or so later, I had my chance. I was just outside the city on my way to see the parson of a village three miles away, when I saw Crawley strolling along a hundred yards or less ahead of me. I soon overtook him, and found him cordial, bound for nowhere in particular, and pleased, or at least, prepared, to walk with me.

"Do you ever see any of your old friends at the House," I asked, "or that man at Corpus who was always in your rooms? You were always great at men in other colleges, I remember." I was trying to make our old acquaintance a foundation, a convenient and healthy soil, on which to build up a new confidence.

"I've lost touch with them all, I'm afraid," he pro-

claimed. "I soon found that they were not in my line after all."

"They changed, then?" I did not blush to enquire; would he not admit that it was not they who had changed?

"I suppose so," he answered with what seemed invulnerable candour, and I saw that I could not fruitfully continue on these lines. I apparently turned the talk to myself. "I am having a terrific struggle with poor Marlow's letters; he didn't date half of them, and some I can't place within five years."

"What a beastly habit!"

"It hardly seems to fit in with the alarming precision of his writing, does it?"

"I suppose not; but I don't read him."

"Aren't you going to," I was rather nettled, "now?"

"He's not in my line, you know." He seemed definite enough, and conscious of having a line, at any rate.

"What would you call your line?"

"Don't you read me?"

"Well, are you in *my* line?"

"What's that?"

I paused; then, "I suppose I saw more of Marlow than anyone did."

He laughed pleasantly. "You think seeing another man is line enough for you to take?"

"Line enough for anyone, when the other man's Marlow. You ought to have known him."

"You think he might have had a good effect upon me? Should I have liked him? Perhaps I should now feel more at home in his house in that case."

"Aren't you comfortable?"

"Oh! yes, my wife sees to that."

"I wonder what Marlow would have made of a wife," I said half to myself.

"What she would have made of him, you mean. Women are wonderful beings, Mallett. They are an encouragement before work, and a rest after it."

"I doubt if he found them a rest; he certainly didn't need their encouragement."

"Why, he'd have been a different man; less inhuman."

"Inhuman?" In an instant the whole range of Crawley's misconceptions had become apparent, misconceptions not only about Marlow, surely, but about all humanity, about what humanity principally is and consists of. Marlow inhuman? Though he had the nicest sense of good and evil, he found nothing inexcusable. No baseness could surprise him, but he was never a cynic. Did Crawley think weakness and intolerance the only signs of humanity?

"You mean," I asked, "he might have had more prejudices?"

"He might have had fewer. Oh! I thought myself once that I was an Olympian, thought I knew better, and understood more than other people—that's a prejudice, if you like—and thought their common sense was common nonsense."

"And what changed you?"

"My wife, of course. She believed in me, and made me believe in other people. I used to be cynical enough, Lord knows, but now everything is turned round; I only seem to see the bright side of things."

"Which accounts for your wonderful success," I couldn't help saying.

"I know; I'm always telling my wife that I owe it all to her."

"I expect that that is as true almost as it is pretty," I answered.

We had arrived at my destination, but I was glad Crawley would not come in with me. I had had the peep at him which I had been wanting, but the penny I had had to pay seemed a sickening sum. It was all my interest in him that I had been made to give up, every hope I had been nursing of his having possibilities. I could sympathise with an able man who used his ability to keep the pot boiling, especially if he did it on such a splendid scale, with such a flaming, roaring fire, and such a rich and savoury smell rising from the pot. But Crawley's case was different. It was not even a gorgeous great piece of hypocrisy in the grand manner, I could see that. He had just meanly and meekly descended, with his wife leading him by the nose, descended into the lowest and largest success, without once looking back at

what he had left behind and above; that possible future which he had seemed to have before him, so rich for all its obscurity, he had just turned his blind eye upon it. Now the man in him was at the same low level as the author, and his talk about his faculty for seeing the bright side was only too abominably honest. He was a quite unconscious hypocrite, and that is the worst sort.

Soon after this wretchedly revealing conversation, I shut up my house and went to Italy for six months without seeing the Crawleys again. Half the Marlow letters, almost all the earlier ones, were written from Italy, or else, during his short absences, to his friends there. I enjoyed my time abroad quite unexpectedly much and the figure of Marlow, as I had first known him, began to emerge for me again. It had been obscured by the brighter living image of the man I had known in his later life, the man as I last saw and still so blessedly remembered him. The more sides of him that I came delightedly up against, the more I was impressed with him. People were amused, of course; they always have been; said it was an obsession. What matter? It was a noble great bee to entertain in one's all too empty bonnet, and I had small appetite except for its honey. Besides, I'm the calmest and sanest of men. Still, it is true that his influence, cut at the roots as it was, went on growing upon me, gripping me from unexpected quarters, and plentifully flowering.

No one I saw in Italy knew or cared anything about Crawley, and the only reference to him that I noticed in the English papers—there must have been lots of others—was to the effect that his "eagerly awaited new novel" would not now be published till the autumn. Once back in Wells, I made no attempt to see him, though I heard that he was still at Well House. But some three weeks after my return, I met his wife in the street, she came straight up to me.

"How are you, Mrs. Crawley?"

"How do you do? We have been wondering what had become of you."

"I have been abroad."

"I know, but since you came back?"

"I have been fearfully busy."

"Horrid your not coming to see us sooner, Mr. Mallock."

"Horrid for me," the woman always made me insincere.

"How is your husband?"

"Very well, really, but he isn't getting on with his work as well or as quickly as he usually does; he seems unsettled."

"I'm sorry; perhaps it's the house; I don't fancy he has ever been quite at ease in it."

"Oh! it's not that. He's thoroughly settled in it now. In fact he won't come away, though I think a change might do him good."

"I expect you are right."

"But I am going away myself for six weeks to Vichy; so that'll be some change for him. I am determined on that. I think wives ought to leave their husbands sometimes; it makes for better understanding, don't you think?"

"You forget I am a miserable bachelor."

"I hope you are ashamed of it. You are a writer, too. You know I don't think anyone ought to be allowed to write or preach until they are married. What can they know of human nature?"

Before I dared remind her of the admiration she professed for the vehemently celibate Marlow, she continued, "I am off the day after tomorrow, so this must be good-bye; I hope you will look in on my husband sometimes."

"I shall be delighted," I politely lied, looking her straight in the eyes. Crawley had come to affect me more disagreeably than his outrageous wife did. She had not declined, at least not in my experience; so that I felt that her effectiveness, which was not smaller than her husband's, was less objectionable. I did not try to see him, or wish to see him, but one evening I met him in the street near his house, and could not escape stopping.

"Hullo, Mallett, I heard you were back."

"How are you, you don't look very well." I wondered whether he was the type of man that likes being told this, or the type that loathes it. I did not discover.

"No, I'm not. I can't manage to get any work done. I wish you would come in and have a drink, I believe you

have only been in the house once since we have been here."

"Thank you, I should like to."

In a few minutes I was inside Well House. It was still unchanged. The instant I entered it, I became the prey of a strange remoteness. It was like a dream in which my will was detached or non-existent, and everything that I did or saw was the same as what had happened before in an almost forgotten situation, not similar to, but identical with, this. I felt I was mechanically performing some well-rehearsed part, every detail of which had been robbed by repetition of all meaning. The whole crowded experience was over in a minute—I had known it happen before—the walls took on their habitual solidity, and, though a little dazed and wondering, I found myself looking again with ordinary eyes at the elegant eighteenth century fanlight over the door, the white walls with their Blondel prints, the painted Venetian chairs, and the exquisitely arranged *garniture de cheminée*.

I followed Crawley into his study, which looked as if Marlow had just walked out of it. His books lined two of the walls, the fireplace and two French windows occupied the third, and on the fourth the three pictures serenely and beautifully hung, to which he had been all but too jealously attached, a view of the Salute attributed to Guardi, a sketch for a ceiling by Piazzetta, and a large dark painting of Leda by Furini, full of a particular sensuous and romantic refinement. Every detail in the room represented a nice choice of Marlow's, and his taste affected me as quite uncannily continuing here its decided and individual existence. Crawley, sitting opposite to me, struck me less as an intruder than as a completely casual visitor to the place. He guessed that I must be considering the associations that the room held for me. "Tell me a little about Marlow," he said. "You were his best friend, weren't you? You admire his work a great deal?"

"Inordinately, if that is possible, this side idolatry."

"But he never sold much?"

"Exactly."

"Aren't any genuinely good authors popular, then?"

Crawley hardly seemed to be criticizing my statements; it was as though he was just ingenuously trying to find things out, looking at them, as a child might, with new eyes.

"Oh! yes, but not with the absolute *gros public*."

"You mean my public?"

"I suppose it is."

"And you don't mind living in a country where you are so much out of sympathy with the main crowd of ordinary people?"

"What is the use of minding? It's the same everywhere, and always has been. Only now the crowd count quite terribly, and have to be given books."

"I thought you were a democrat, Mallett!"

"Good Lord, no! You think things are all right, so you are a Tory. I'm on the other side, because I think they are all wrong, and can't get much worse. But I shall always be among the minority."

"Perhaps you are right. At any rate I have been wondering if I haven't been wrong. I can't see things cut and dry as I used to. My writing is suffering in consequence."

"I expect you have been working too hard."

"It can hardly be that. I had two months' holiday in Switzerland just before we came here, and since I have been here I have put in less time at my writing than usual. I'm not feeling tired either. Just nerves, I expect; the only remedy is to take no notice. I suppose the place is healthy. Marlow never had any trouble here, did he?"

"No, it suited him admirably, was the one place where he was happy, in fact, and could write comfortably."

"I could always work anywhere; this is the first time I have had any difficulty at all. Honestly, I can't make out what the matter is."

"Well, I expect you will feel fit again soon; I hope so."

Soon afterwards I left him. Crawley certainly looked worried, but I thought that some hindrance to that horribly easy and copious flow could only be good, and, in any case, I cared little to what extent a stream of such writing as his was obstructed.

Every day I read some book of Marlow's for a little while, not only because it restores for me the sense of his

friendly company, but also to be sure not to lose any ground in my taste for him. His work is so fine, so carefully quiet, so largely composed of deftly imperceptible touches, that one wants to keep in practice. He always maintained that the reader was an artist too, and that any book worth its salt made dire and dreadful demands on him. "The response is all exquisitely his—I am the composer, he the executant."

One night about a month after this last meeting with Crawley, I was reading Marlow, going over a familiar passage in one of his last books to get every ounce of meaning out of it, with the patience of a pianist, when Crawley was announced. I told the servant to bring him in, and composed myself to the possibility of further slimy revelations of his state. He hardly attempted any general talk before diving ungracefully and nervously into the recital of his troubles, "I can't work," he started, "I think I am going mad. And I've got to tell you about it, though I don't know that I care about you much, and I'm sure you don't care about me."

I was unpleasantly damped by the splash, but after all if a man falls flat into the water, it is himself that he hurts most. Before I could do more than sketch a gesture, he hurried on, "I can't make it out. I have even seen the doctor, but he says there is nothing wrong. It was bad enough when my wife went away, but it has got worse, fifty times worse, now."

"Wouldn't you have been wise to go away with her?"

He laughed. "It isn't my wife's absence that hurts me," and his laugh was not pleasant.

"I mean for the change."

He stared a moment. "You don't understand," he seemed angry. "This place is the only thing that makes life bearable; if I hadn't that house to live in, I should be done for. I've come to like it so much that I should feel at sea anywhere else. It's the one pleasure I have left." He looked round my room a little, and the pursued look on his face faded a little. "I'm sure you're a good chap, Mallett, I somehow feel at home here too. Do listen to me."

"That's all right, Crawley, go on." There was a helpless

note in his voice which took one's sympathy more than the wildness of what he said.

"It's as if I were changing into another man," he said, "like Jekyll and Hyde, you know. Only it's gradual. I'm already less than half myself, and yet the funny thing is that sometimes I catch myself feeling and saying things in the way I did years ago, when you used to know me before, as I haven't done for years. Oh! it's a nightmare, though, a foul, incredible dream, and it goes on getting worse. Everything is slipping away from me, heaven is turning into hell."

"After all, this is earth, a very different affair from heaven," I said, to stop this outburst, which became less enlightening as it grew more violent.

"That's just what's wrong," he said after a moment, and in a quieter voice; and he then began to tell me in a different way, with a sort of intense, eager calmness, what had happened, or rather what was so actually and rapidly happening. "It isn't only my work, but that is where it shows itself most clearly. You have never read a book of mine, have you, Mallett?"

"Yes, your first, and half your second."

"Well, that's my best work. I've gone on getting steadily worse ever since. I needn't explain what's wrong with them all to you—you know it as well as I do. But I've only just found it out. I suppose you thought I had my tongue in my cheek, didn't you?"

"I certainly hoped you had, till the day we met out in the country. I admit it was a bit of a shock to discover your sincerity."

"Well, imagine what I feel like, after all these years. Why, we shall soon be old men, Mallett—and I discover now, at this point, that I've been false all through, in good faith enough, but false, false in a filthy sentimental way."

"You pleased your public, anyhow."

"The public! If it had only one neck, I'd like to wring it. I revelled in my public, I lived to please it, I thought it couldn't be wrong—I know you will hardly believe I could be such a fool, but I was—and when people ran it down, I just thought it was because they were failures themselves, and jealous."

"I see," I said, and then, still thinking of course of the man's relation to his readers. "It must be like finding out suddenly that your wife has been betraying you for years."

"So she has."

"I didn't mean that."

"I dare say you didn't, but she has. She has always encouraged me to do the wrong thing, made me see the wrong side, stopped me if ever I tried for a moment the other way; though that was seldom enough, Lord knows."

"But she really believes in you, doesn't she? She's sincere at any rate?"

"Sincere? Oh! we were both sincere, we are all sincere, but what's the good of that? Lies aren't any the truer for being mistakes, are they? I've wired to tell her not to come back yet, I couldn't face her. She'll never wake up, never see things as they are; she honestly admires me, thinks I am a great writer, and an influence for good, and who knows what rot besides. She knows what is the profitable way of taking life; she's a woman; she knows that prettiness pays."

All this was no use to him, or to me. I wanted to find out just what had happened, so I made another attempt. "How did it all start?"

"We had been in the house about six months, I had got half-way through a book when I began to catch myself hesitating, crossing things out, rewriting whole chapters. I couldn't get on at all, and when at last I had done something that I thought was all right, I would find out that it was not what I wanted, it was in quite a different style from the rest of the book. And so it went on. I walked up and down the room, where I tried to work, half the night, sat in one chair, then in another, looked at each picture in turn; but when I started to write, the words that came, and they came slowly enough in all conscience, weren't mine at all. They seemed to come to me from outside, and, almost without passing through my brain, before I could weigh them or adjust them, they were on the paper. And the words I found myself writing gradually showed me a whole new plan or plane of things. Each day I tormentedly add

something to my manuscript, and each day the rottenness, the simple falsity of all I saw and thought and wrote before grows clearer."

"Do you mean that you used to see life *couleur de rose*, and that now you only see the grim side?"

"It's hardly that. There's nothing of the realistic, as they call it, in the stuff I am turning out, if it is indeed I who am turning it out. I think I now see pretty straight, appallingly straight, I nearly said, but it isn't only the sordid and depressing and ugly side that I see, at least it wouldn't be if I were someone else."

"That is not very clear," I interrupted.

"I mean it's ugly only because my life was ugly, my work is ugly. The new hard light does not only illuminate unpleasant truths, but all that I have to show, everything personal to me, is unpleasant, infernally so. I don't see the earth as a monkey-house and the universe as a menagerie, as some writers have, but I see myself as all too definitely a beast."

"But now that you see yourself like that, surely you aren't like that any more."

"No, but I'm a monster, half man, half beast now. I still can turn out an occasional page of the old sort. I'm torn in two. And, what is the worst of all, I can't understand it, can't make out how it has all come about. Good-night, and thank you awfully." He was gone before I could open the door for him.

It was clear what had happened to Crawley, but what was not clear was the manner of it, the cause. I understood that he had woken up, but what had roused him? Not even the approach of death usually manages to rouse such a man from that kind of dream or hallucination, and he had not even been ill. I looked on all sides for an explanation. There must have been a shock, a definite, violent, probably unexpected and unspeakably unpleasant happening, some illusion suddenly shattered, which had brought down with a rush the whole sham edifice which he had taken for life, undermined its wretched foundations and exposed the weakness of its gay and gallant towers. Yet he spoke of his trouble as a process rather than as an

event, a gradual and increasingly terrifying process, an irresistible, pitiless and still incomplete invasion of himself by something outside. What could that something be? I was wondering, when I was struck by a worse, a simply staggering question; what was I to do? Admittedly Crawley was still only half alive to the extent of his discovery; was I to help him in exploring its implications, to encourage him in what was proving so desperately dangerous a search? At first I had taken my part all thoughtlessly and haughtily for granted; I had assumed that truth was the only thing that mattered. But was it worth more than happiness and contentment to Crawley? I had to ask myself. After all, I had no mission to disturb him, no reason to invade his comfortable life with cruel, conquering truths, or even to assist at such an atrocious business. I could try to find comfort in the belief that it was too late now, that things had gone too far, for any line that I could take to matter, save in so far as I might shorten or alleviate the struggle, or attend its inevitable conclusion with some attempt at consolation. Even that was not so sure. Couldn't I perhaps be wrong, and Crawley, the old Crawley, right? I must not take it for granted that my beliefs were true, though they seemed so beyond all fear, or hope, of plausible contradiction—my beliefs, I mean, of course, in so far as they were consequent on an apparently open and unbiassed view of things. Again, however unmistakably it was reality and honesty and things as they are to which Crawley was at last waking up, he could not conceivably have the same experienced certainty of it that I had; however sure I might feel, he still might be persuaded that it was his new outlook, and not his old one, which was so vividly deluded. He admitted to being half mad now, and he was sane enough in all conscience before, judged by ordinary standards. I had not committed myself one way or the other during the alarming outburst that was still ringing in my ears, so that, for all my efforts to make light of my future responsibility, it lay solidly and inevitably in my way, and even inaction would be an act of quite violent choice and conviction on my part. Once this fact had loomed clearly and menacingly into my sight, I quickly made up my mind that the best

course to take for the present was to try to discover how Crawley's unexplained experience had come about, and at the same time to be prepared at any moment and with the least possible hesitation to bring all my weight to bear on whatever side I might with good reason increasingly incline towards. I should anyhow need to know whether the change in Crawley was due to the influence of any book or person that he had come across, in order to be able, unless I decided for continued inaction, to support or combat it with any vehemence that I could command.

I did not get to sleep till after three o'clock that night, but when I woke in the morning I surprised my servant by suddenly laughing out loud, long, and almost hysterically. The grotesque scene of the previous evening, its macabre quality destroyed by the daylight, appeared just ridiculous, deliciously ridiculous, indeed almost too good to be true. I found my own scrupulous considerations ponderously absurd, and my day was enlivened by frequent and increasingly comic pictures of Crawley forgetting his facility in a feverish search for the *mot juste*, attempting an epigram and effecting an approximate definition only by successive negations.

So that evening I went round to Well House intending to make light of all Crawley's symptoms, and to show him, if I could, his state in the new light which the morning had thrown on it for me. When I arrived he seemed painfully glad to see me, and already I felt less certain about the quality of the affair. I had forgotten how shockingly ill he was looking.

"How are you feeling?"

"Pretty well, really, considering."

"Did you sleep?"

"No, not much. But then I got interested in a book, *L'Education Sentimentale*." I saw that he wished to change the current from too direct a play upon his case. The confidences which so suddenly break into full flower under the genial influences of night, shrink before the light of day, and the memory of his outburst now seemed to make Crawley uncomfortable. Moreover, sharing his preoccupations had probably lightened them a little, and put them

better under his control. But his distress, for being more restrained, was not the less apparent.

"Do you know it?" he went on.

"Oh, yes! It's a masterpiece."

"So someone told me. I tried to read it before, once. And I couldn't. I don't read many novels, you know. I've never found them very interesting."

"Are you not interested in them as a novelist, I mean in their technique? Don't you like to consider how you would have approached the same subject, by what method you would have treated it?"

"I don't; I know what my method is, and I don't care about any other, if there is any other worth considering. At least I didn't."

"What was your method?"

"Oh, just straight at the fence."

"Without considering what might be on the other side?"

"Hardly; for I always knew there was good ground to land on. I begin with my plot, you see, next add the characters that are necessary, and then put in any further colouring that is wanted."

"And dish up in the style of the *Code Napoléon*?" I was putting it politely. "It seems a happy-go-lucky sort of recipe," I added.

"But it eats all right."

So far the conversation seemed to me to lead to no possible place of purpose, but a sudden flash made me switch it a little. "You still have not read any Marlow, I suppose?"

"Not a word," he answered.

I was disappointed. For an enchanted moment I had believed that I had discovered the cause of the whole situation. It would, I admit, have been a quite overwhelmingly gratifying solution to me. But I instantly cursed myself for a self-centered fool. It was not in the least likely that Marlow's influence rather than any other should have proved so fatal to poor Crawley. Marlow's books were eminently *not* noisy or provocatively powerful. In style and method they were insinuating rather than revolutionary; refinements on previous work; the exquisite culmination of a tradition; while the subjects and situations subtly

achieved their interest by their avoidance of all violence. Beautifully honest and sincere writing as it was, it did not shout the truth, it ever so delicately and ironically suggested it. These were the last books, I concluded, to effect such a prodigious conversion. Marlow, the man, on the other hand, might have wonderfully brought it about, he might have brought anything about, with that well-ordered and severely controlled, but potentially devastating personality of his; but he always preferred to direct it exclusively to his art, and even in the practice of that, to hold it back from any touch of vulgar insistence or self-assertion. All in spite of his own intentions he had won the completest ascendancy over me, and Crawley might have suffered the same splendid domination, if he had only come up against the huge honesty of the man in person. Even the richest reading of his books was inadmissible as possibly responsible, and in any case Crawley had not read them, or at least said he hadn't.

"You know, Mallett, I believe you've got Marlow on the brain. One never can tell what *you* think about a thing, only what you think he would have thought. You bring every conversation round to him, and consider every question only in the light you estimate he'd have thrown on it, or it on him. Everyone notices it. It's an *idée fixe*, a mania, and a devilish annoying one. Get a sense of proportion, man, or I shall begin to think that your sense of humour isn't all it might be."

"Perhaps you are right; it sometimes isn't. I took your troubles seriously last night. But don't worry. I see how sublimely comic they really are," the temptation to say this was vulgar enough, but only just resistible. There was no truth, of course, in his attack. How could there be? But the more the unfairness of the man pushed itself up to one, the less I wished to show of resentment. Wasn't it a continual signal of the real disorder he had fallen in? The few minutes I had spent in the house had already shown me that the situation was not as exclusively comic as I had persuaded myself it must be.

"Have you read anything very striking lately, beside the Flaubert?" I said as casually as I could.

"I tell you it's nothing of that sort."

"You have met no one?" I frankly pursued.

"You are yourself the only imaginable person, and you know how little I have seen of you."

"And you have had no shock, no accident or illness, or worry—of any sort?"

"Nothing but the thing itself."

"You mean that since you came here nothing has occurred which could conceivably have caused this—" I hesitated a moment, "this situation. You haven't given up any of your habits, and you are not, for instance, missing anyone, whom you cannot see here?"

"No, I am not; and I am not keeping anything from you either, I assure you."

"Then there is nothing different in your life since you have been here and your life before?"

"Nothing but the house that I live in."

The secret, whatever it was, of the change in Crawley was as dark, I felt sure, to his consciousness as it was to mine, and until this was explained, the case remained sinister, but it was a secret that I was determined to discover; so I approached the subject from the other end. "Don't you think," I asked, "that an artist of any sort, specially a novelist, has a rather particular psychology?"

"I do, but don't include me among the artists."

"You are one naturally; your success only goes to show that you took up the wrong, or, shall we say, the popular view of things."

"I have been thinking about it a lot lately," said Crawley, "I think it is all a question of sensibility."

"Taking the word in the fullest sense, you mean that the artist is the man who is a little more sensitive than his fellows?"

"No, I mean that the artist is the man who can control his sensibility a little better than his fellows, the man who can consciously choose which impressions he wants to be sensitive to, and only expose himself to them."

I picked up his argument. "So that the sincerity of his work will depend on the disinterestedness with which he makes his choice?"

"Yes, and the quality of his work on the skill with which he makes it."

"But surely the choice is often forced upon you, and any movement of your will in it is unconscious?"

"Oh, yes," he said. "But then a lot of good art is unconscious, isn't it? Men make the right choice by accident, and stumble on the truth."

"By exposing themselves to the right sort of impression?"

"That's it," he said.

There was a pause in which I was suddenly and stunningly enlightened, and in which he must have experienced a revulsion on very different grounds. For he jumped up abruptly from his chair, gave me a look charged with suspicion and defiance, and said in a voice which affected me as almost menacing. "I'm afraid I have been talking a lot of rot, Mallett, don't pay any attention to it. Last night as well. My nerves have been playing the deuce with me lately. I seem to lose all control of myself. In fact, I hardly remember what I have been saying. It's like some silly dream you have forgotten next morning." Then in a louder voice, "Do you see?"

"Of course." I saw he wanted me to go, so I went. I wanted to go myself, to be alone, to think.

Crawley had been thinking things out to some purpose. Like a child helping another to look for some artfully hidden thing, I had followed him at every step and turn, till he innocently led me up to the object of our search, and suddenly turned his back on it, just when he was "hottest"; and then my eye had been quickly caught by its silver gleam. His case was clear to me, though what my part in the uncompleted development of it must be, remained in the bleakest obscurity.

I had always told Marlow, in my braver moments of criticism, that he overdid his backgrounds; *he* always maintained that one could not over-emphasize the effect everything round one has, the perpetual bombardment that attacks one's unconsciousness. How true what he meant was, had now been made alarmingly clear to me by Crawley of all unlikely men, by a practical demonstration, to which he was himself still blind. A brighter light now illuminated

for me the whole importance of Marlow's attitude in early days. His letters showed that from the first he had set out to show a blank, but infinitely sensitive, surface to the world, to offer it a clean canvas to paint on, but only—and this, I suddenly saw, was crucial—to the part of the world which he selected; that is to say that he kept his instinctive and lovely and rare preconceptions of what was worth while, and then exposed himself to it—to what was worth while, I mean—with the completest candour and conviction. His attempt had succeeded to admiration. Crawley's career had, by a quite beautiful parallel, been equally governed by an original act of selection (though in his case any consciousness of it that had ever existed had long since disappeared) and its success in its own direction was perhaps equally remarkable. That success was now mortally endangered. It was uncanny to see Crawley caught in such a quiet, tightening grip; he had plunged into this pronounced and personal and thickly charged atmosphere with so touching an innocence. I still did not know whether to try to extricate him. I decided at any rate to tell him what I concluded was the source of the change in him; but even if I succeeded in convincing him, which might not be too arduous, as the conclusion was deduced from his own premises, it would be impossibly difficult not to represent the influence that I was revealing in a good light.

The next afternoon, just as I was going out to expose to Crawley my startling and almost sinister explanation, I was told that Mrs. Crawley would like to see me. I knew her husband had not been expecting her, but I went at once to the room into which she had been shown. "How are you, Mrs. Crawley? This pleasure is a great surprise. I did not know that you were returning yet."

"I only arrived this morning, but I had to come and see you at once. I am desperately worried, Mr. Mallock."

"I am distressed to hear it. If I can be of any service——" I began. My politeness to women is apt to be too formal—a sign, I fancy, of an intensely bachelor temperament.

"You can," she interrupted, "or I shouldn't be here—and you must be. I mean I'm sure you will. It's my husband. He's ever so much worse."

"I'm sorry; when I left him last night, he seemed much better."

"Worse than when I went away," she explained. "He has told me how kind you have been to him, that's why I have come to you now."

"Won't you tell me just what you think the trouble is?"

"I don't know; besides you know just as much as I do, or more."

I could see that she distrusted me instinctively, and thought that I was at any rate partly responsible for what had happened to her husband. "You know, Mrs. Crawley, I was away when the trouble started; I have seen him very seldom since he came to Wells."

"But what is 'the trouble,' please tell me that?"

"I mean the difficulty he is finding with his work."

"Yes, and it's more than that," she paused a moment. "But what's the cause of it?"

"How am I to know? I wish you would give me your account of it from the beginning."

"I can't say exactly when the beginning was, but it must have been four months ago, perhaps more; when I come to think of it, he seems to have begun to change almost from the time we came here. But I hardly noticed anything until we had been here about six months; perhaps he had been a little more difficult than usual in some ways—you know, he is ordinarily the most easy-going man in the world, too much so, I often told him. Then the novel he was working on began to be a difficulty; he has always enjoyed wonderful fluency and facility. He became discontented with the half of it which was already written; I thought it was as good as anything that he had done, and I told him so. Soon it appeared that he was not feeling satisfied with any of his work. I thought his nerves might be troubling him, and, of course, I kept reminding him of what an enormous success he had had, and how everyone loved and admired his work. Then he turned on me——" She stopped, struggling with her emotion, and trying desperately, it seemed, not to expose too nakedly what was personal to her in the story. But I soon saw that this was just what she most abjectly enjoyed. She positively darted to the front of the

stage, and posed her noble sorrow in the most telling limelight. "He told me it was my fault, that I had deliberately hoodwinked him and ruined his writing. I didn't try to answer him. Oh, no! for twenty-five years I have stood by him, giving him courage and spurring him on. No one ever appreciated his wonderful gift as I did. And in the time of his trouble, it was I whom he attacked. So I went away. You will say, Mr. Mallett, that my place should have been still by his side, quiet and loyal and staunch. But I tried to look at things broadly and impartially, I always try to do that. I thought I might be getting on his nerves, so I went away for six weeks. He hardly wrote to me, but I was ready to forgive him for that. Then he wired to me not to return yet, but I knew, my woman's instinct told me, where my duty was. I am only afraid that I am too late."

"But to what do you attribute this extraordinary change?" I asked.

"I'm hopelessly in the dark. I can't make it out at all. I should imagine someone had been continually talking to Walter, arguing with him and persuading him all the time. But I know that no one can have. It's simply not natural, what has happened. Things that he has said to me and things that he has written which I have seen aren't like him at all. He has become entirely different, a stranger. It's killing me, Mr. Mallock; he's mad already, and I soon shall be. What are we to do?"

She was entirely broken down now, and was crying in a way that made me feel helpless, but angry and otherwise quite unmoved as far as she was concerned. Her enjoyment of the scene she was making almost flirtatiously for my benefit did not prevent her feeling for her husband being sincere, and as deep, I felt sure, as any feelings of which she was capable. But about that I cared little. What confronted me was the matter of his relations to her. He could hardly bear to be in the same house with her now out of anger and contempt, but his bitterness showed the depth of his disillusionment and the extent of his real affection for her. Indeed it seemed possible that he was affected less by the discovery of his own badness than by

that of her fatuity, if indeed he thought it was fatuity, and not persevering interested cleverness. I might be sure that belief in him had inspired her masterly policy, but in his new general suspiciousness, he probably believed that she had seen through him all the time as clearly as he now saw through himself. In any case he cared for her, and I realised that, on account of this powerful personal relationship, his great awakening to facts might merely make him for the rest of his days a miserable and embittered cynic; and in that case his last state would be no nearer than his first to what I remember Marlow calling "a condition of sight blessedly undistorted by either smoked or rose-coloured glasses." My calculations had not included the effect which the continued disintegration of his married life must have on Crawley, but the more I considered his former practical dependence upon his wife, the more I inclined to regret an intellectual alteration in him which did not diminish his need of her, but made it intolerable to him. The irony of the situation lay in my knowledge that Marlow himself would have turned angrily and resolutely away from effecting such a change in a man's life, when the man was entangled by the fifty years of his past in the way that Mrs. Crawley's husband was. He had always been uneasy about his influence on me (which people are so fond of exaggerating), and that was an incomparably lighter responsibility.

I was deprived of my last excuse for continued inaction by my confidence that I had rightly diagnosed the cause of what we had agreed to call "the trouble." If once his wife could persuade him to place himself out of the reach or play of it, I foresaw that he would quickly resume his old unpleasing and contented self. It was not unlikely that he would be more ready to comply if I gave him my advice himself but I wanted his wife, if possible, to be the agent of this immoral cure; for one thing I preferred to preserve in his eyes my attitude of apparent detachment. There remained another difficulty. It might be easy to convince him that my theory of his case was right. But it would not be easy to persuade him to repel or run away from an agency that he must hold to be supernaturally enlightening.

On the other hand, it would be difficult to make Mrs. Crawley believe in anything so fantastic. If I told her to give up Well House because it was haunted, my imagination would be hard put to it to invent a sufficiently sinister ghost, and Crawley would, of course, laugh at the idea. But I could hardly throw suspicion on the drains, either.

"I am afraid I cannot explain matters to you," I said to Mrs. Crawley, who had at last stopped crying, "but of course I'll tell you what I should do in your place."

"I was sure you would have a plan. A specialist, do you think?" Apparently she only asked for my suggestions in order to put forward her own.

"I don't think doctors can be of much use. What symptoms has he to offer except the difficulty with his work?"

"You don't understand; it isn't so much the bother with this book that I mind; it's the way he runs down the old ones."

"I understand you, but a doctor wouldn't. He might even consider that a sign of increasing sanity."

She did not understand. "You think it is madness, then, yourself, Mr. Mallett?"

"I think you ought to get your husband away from here at any cost."

"Yes, I am sure a change would do him good."

"Get him away for good."

"But why? He'll never consent to give up the lease. He's devoted to the house, and I'm quite happy here; at least I was. But Walter has a perfect passion for the house, it's a mania."

"It is, Mrs. Crawley," I said as impressively as I could, and that was as near as I could approach to the absurd and tragic truth. "I don't know how to explain it to you exactly. If you suffer from some form of illness, you are often specially liable to attacks of it in certain places, for no apparent reason. All you can do is to avoid those places—permanently."

I saw with an ever grimmer clearness how impossible it was to find any reason which could frighten the Crawleys away from their house. It seemed that I was to be compelled to do nothing, because there was nothing I could

do. I should have done better to decide upon inaction from the first. But I had not done so, and my interview with Mrs. Crawley was making clearer than ever the need for action, though showing me also its desperate difficulty. To quarrel with them violently and then to do my outrageous best to make life disagreeable for them here might be the benevolent course to take, but I hardly felt that my friendship with Crawley was close enough to make so thankless and troublesome a kindness incumbent upon me. My wish naturally was to wash my hands of the whole affair. But I was more or less committed to it, and hardly selfish enough to withdraw completely. Why not leave the issue to fate, in the shape of Mrs. Crawley's willingness to trust me?

I began with a hint that deserved to predispose her in my favour. "The important thing, Mrs. Crawley, is that your husband must never guess that he is being saved from himself. He will cling to his illness or hallucination or whatever you choose to call it with all the obstinate affection of a madman. You will only manage to get him away from it by producing some plausibly selfish reason for your wish to go away; that is, of course, if you will admit my prescription of abandoning your house here at all costs and for good."

"I trust you absolutely," she said. "I clutch at you, as if I were drowning."

"I shall certainly only prove a straw, if you let your husband suspect that you are clutching me. He may guess that you wish to restore him to his old self, in fact he is sure to. But he must never suspect me. You see, he imagines that I sympathise with his new point of view."

"But you don't, do you?"

"I do not think it is good for him. But he must not discover that."

"I see," she said, but I doubted if she did. Three minutes later she was gone, after extracting a promise from me to come down to Well House after dinner that night.

I found Mrs. Crawley sitting alone in her drawing-room, so that we did not have to act for her husband's benefit the uneasy comedy of a pretended first meeting since her return.

"I have followed your advice to the letter," she began, "and have asked Walter to let the house for as long as he can, for the remainder of our lease if possible, and to take me abroad for a few months, to the Fjords, perhaps, and then to find a flat in London. I told him that the place did not suit me, that I had felt better the instant I went away this time; I even explained my wish to him on the ground that I did not feel at all myself here, made out that it was I who was off the rails, not he."

"I am afraid he is too conscious of the change in himself to be taken in."

"Yes, but he is inclined to go. I made a tremendous appeal to him, but I fancy he is waiting to speak to you, before he makes me any promise."

Crawley then came in. I felt that he looked at us as if we were conspiring against him, but my imagination must have been at fault, as he must have believed that we had not had the time to arrange any plan.

"I hear your wife is not well; I am so sorry."

"She wants me to go away with her."

"I think it will do you good, too," I said, boldly.

He turned on me. "Do I want doing good to, then?"

I could see his wife was on the point of giving our show away, knocking over the setting that I had so carefully arranged, and exposing to our victim the whole bag of artfully thought out tricks. But before she revealed the estimate she cherished of the almost infinite improvement of which he had come, in *my* opinion, to stand in need, I intervened. "Most decidedly you do; you are not cured yet, you must admit."

Mrs. Crawley shot at me a look of withering astonishment and distrust. She was disgustedly wondering why I had given her the trouble of being told to conceal my agreement with her view of his case, if it was only to proclaim it myself. Crawley, of course, took it quite otherwise; "No," he said, "You're right. But will going away help?"

"I believe it would help a lot," I said. "Anyhow, your wife wants to go for her own sake, doesn't she?"

"You should ask her that."

"I've told you so again and again, Walter," she protested.

"Though why there should be all this mystification I really don't see."

"What mystification?" asked Crawley, and again I thought our game was definitely up.

"Don't you see, Crawley," I broke in. "You and I have been talking in a way your wife cannot conceivably understand. She needs to go away and naturally doesn't see why you should consult me about the effect on yourself."

"But what will the effect be?" Crawley asked. "That's my question."

I openly signalled to his wife that I wanted a minute with him alone. Then, "Don't be sentimental about yourself Crawley, and think a little more about your wife. Going away can only do you good; it will open your eyes wider than staying here could."

"I'll go, if you really think so."

"I really and definitely do."

"That settles it."

He called his wife and they began to discuss the possibility of letting Well House. I left them with the promise to come and make my farewells before they left. I contrived, however, some urgent business in London, which I wrote apologetically to tell them of, and a week later I heard that they had let the house and gone to Norway. I was left to work on the Letters, and to wonder what he would have done had he been in my case.

Six months after this I saw in the paper that Mr. Walter Crawley's long-promised novel had at last appeared; it was in his best and most characteristic manner. This consoled me to some extent for I had by no means recovered from a sense of undeserved injury and from a distracting number of simply detestable reflections. I felt that in spite of all my wriggings I had been cruelly caught and all my care for the truth transfixed and used in what might prove an unsuccessful attempt to attract to the Crawleys the savoury portion of daily contentment which they, or at any rate I, assumed was prescriptively theirs. There had seemed to be nothing doubtful about their case—their cases, I should say. She was from the first and with all the force of her nature too simple and single ever to be faced with any

doubts about what she wanted, or he needed. And my gesture, all the grander, I felt, for having no audience to applaud, or even to perceive it, had prevented any responsibility from perching on his unaccustomed shoulders. I had acted generously because I believed in his generosity—in his unhesitating choice in preference to all else, if ever he had to choose, of what was at last and so unexpectedly appearing before his eyes as a miraculous vision of truth and reality. Now that I had paid the price, and was sorely reviewing my depleted resources—resources, I mean, of integrity and common honesty, and above all of comfortable and treasured detachment—now it was that I began to wonder if I had not pathetically misplaced my confidence. Perhaps if I had offered my famous explanation to Crawley, and if he had entirely accepted, he might have given in to his wife all the same, but with greater eagerness. He might have determined to take any imaginable step that could deliver him from the handsome but heavy and expensive honour of any further enlightenment. In this case I was groaning under a responsibility, which, if I had offered him the chance to assume it, would not have given him an instant's worry. I had in any case acted as I thought for the best; but it had meant two unforgettable onslaughts on truth. A few polite or evasive lies might not have troubled me, but I had deprived a fellow-creature, an influential writer too, of an unique, a positively providential chance to open his eyes to facts. To do so I had strayed from my customary lovely way of irresponsibility and given my most unambiguous word that a road led to the open, when I knew that it led to the darkest and most padded confinement. These sins had not even made me friends, for the Crawleys would inevitably be my enemies for ever; I knew too much. But now at last and at least I had the assurance that my action had not gone for nothing, and that it was indeed continuously bearing its unappetising fruit.

There was another paragraph in the same paper.

"Mrs. Alastair Wale's enormous and appreciative public will be interested to hear that she has been living for the last six months at Well House, Wells, where Horace Marlow lived for the last thirty years of his life. Her publishers

regret to announce that her eagerly awaited new novel promised for this month cannot now appear till the Autumn."

I hear the house is still unchanged. Decidedly and at any cost I shall avoid meeting Mrs. Wale.

* * * *

But I still wonder what *he* would have done.

SPRING SOWING¹

By LIAM O'FLAHERTY

(From *T. P.'s and Cassell's Weekly*)

IT was still dark when Martin Delaney and his wife Mary got up. Martin stood in his shirt by the window a long time looking out, rubbing his eyes and yawning, while Mary raked out the live coals that had lain hidden in the ashes on the hearth all night. Outside, cocks were crowing and a white streak was rising from the ground as it were and beginning to scatter the darkness. It was a February morning, dry, cold and starry.

The couple sat down to their breakfast of tea, bread and butter, in silence. They had only been married the previous autumn and it was hateful leaving a warm bed at such an early hour. They both felt in a bad humour and ate, wrapped in their thoughts. Martin with his brown hair and eyes, his freckled face and his little fair moustache, looked too young to be married, and his wife looked hardly more than a girl, red-cheeked and blue-eyed, her black hair piled at the rear of her head, with a large comb gleaming in the middle of the pile, Spanish fashion. They were both dressed in rough homespuns, and both wore the loose white frieze shirt that Inverara peasants use for work in the fields.

They ate in silence, sleepy and bad humoured and yet on fire with excitement, for it was the first day of their first spring sowing as man and wife. And each felt the glamour of that day on which they were to open up the earth together and plant seeds in it. So they sat in silence and bad humour, for somehow the imminence of an event that had been long expected, loved, feared and prepared for, made them dejected. Mary, with her shrewd woman's mind, munched her bread and butter and thought of. . . . Oh, what didn't she think of? Of as many things as there

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From "Spring Sowing" by permission of the publisher, Mr. Jonathan Cape.

are in life does a woman think in the first joy and anxiety of her mating. But Martin's mind was fixed on one thought. Would he be able to prove himself a man worthy of being the head of a family by doing his spring sowing well?

In the barn after breakfast, when they were getting the potato seeds and the line for measuring the ground and the spade, a cross word or two passed between them, and when Martin fell over a basket in the half-darkness of the barn, he swore and said that a man would be better off dead than. . . . But before he could finish whatever he was going to say, Mary had her arms around his waist and her face to his.

"Martin," she said, "let us not begin this day cross with one another." And there was a tremor in her voice. And somehow, as they embraced and Martin kept mumbling in his awkward peasant's voice, "pulse of my heart, treasure of my life," and such traditional phrases, all their irritation and sleepiness left them. And they stood there embracing until at last Martin pushed her from him with pretended roughness and said: "Come, come, girl, it will be sunset before we begin, at this rate."

Still, as they walked silently in their raw-hide shoes, through the little hamlet, there was not a soul about. Lights were glimmering in the windows of a few cabins. The sky had a big grey crack in it in the east, as if it were going to burst in order to give birth to the sun. Birds were singing somewhere at a distance. Martin and Mary rested their baskets of seeds on a fence outside the village and Martin whispered to Mary proudly: "We are first, Mary." And they both looked back at the little cluster of cabins, that was the centre of their world, with throbbing hearts. For the joy of spring had now taken complete hold of them.

They reached the little field where they were to sow. It was a little triangular patch of ground under an ivy-covered limestone hill. The little field had been manured with seaweed some weeks before, and the weeds had rotted and whitened on the grass. And there was a big red heap of fresh seaweed lying in a corner by the fence to be spread under the seeds as they were laid. Martin, in spite of the cold, threw off everything above his waist except his striped

woollen shirt. Then he spat on his hands, seized his spade and cried: "Now you are going to see what kind of a man you have, Mary."

"There now," said Mary, tying a little shawl closer under her chin. "Aren't we boastful this early hour of the morning? Maybe I'll wait till sunset to see what kind of a man have I got."

The work began. Martin measured the ground by the southern fence for the first ridge, a strip of ground four feet wide, and he placed the line along the edge and pegged it at each end. Then he spread fresh seaweed over the strip. Mary filled her apron with seeds and began to lay them in rows, four, three, four. When she was a little distance down the ridge Martin advanced with his spade to the head eager to commence.

"Now, in the name of God," he cried, spitting on his palms, "let us raise the first sod!"

"Oh, Martin, wait till I'm with you!" cried Mary, dropping her seeds on the ridge and running up to him. Her fingers outside her woollen mittens were numb with the cold, and she couldn't wipe them in her apron. Her cheeks seemed to be on fire. She put an arm round Martin's waist and stood looking at the green sod his spade was going to cut, with the excitement of a little child.

"Now, for God's sake, girl, keep back!" said Martin gruffly. "Suppose anybody saw us trapesing about like this in the field of our spring sowing, what would they take us for but a pair of useless, soft, empty-headed people that would be sure to die of the hunger. Huh!" He spoke very rapidly, and his eyes were fixed on the ground before him. His eyes had a wild, eager light in them as if some primeval impulse were burning within his brain and driving out every other desire but that of asserting his manhood and of subjugating the earth.

"Oh, what do we care who is looking?" said Mary; but she drew back at the same time and gazed distantly at the ground. Then Martin cut the sod, and pressing the spade deep into the earth with his foot, he turned up the first sod with a crunching sound as the grass roots were dragged out of the earth. Mary sighed and walked back hurriedly to

her seeds with furrowed brows. She picked up her seeds and began to spread them rapidly to drive out the sudden terror that had seized her at that moment when the first sod was turned up and she saw the fierce, hard look in her husband's eyes, that were unconscious of her presence. She became suddenly afraid of that pitiless, cruel earth, the peasant's slave master, that would keep her chained to hard work and poverty all her life until she would sink again into its bosom. Her short-lived love was gone. Henceforth she was only her husband's helper to till the earth. And Martin, absolutely without thought, worked furiously covering the ridge with black earth, his sharp spade gleaming white as he whirled it sideways to beat the sods.

Then, as the sun rose, the little valley beneath the ivy-covered hills became dotted with white frieze shirts, and everywhere men worked madly without speaking and women spread seeds. There was no heat in the light of the sun, and there was a sharpness in the still thin air that made the men jump on their spade hafts ferociously and beat the sods as if they were living enemies. Birds hopped silently before the spades, with their heads cocked sideways, watching for worms. Made brave by hunger they often dashed under the spades to secure their food.

Then, when the sun reached a certain point, all the women went back to the village to get dinner for their men, and the men worked on without stopping. Then the women returned, almost running, each carrying a tin can with a flannel tied around it and a little bundle tied with a white cloth. Martin threw down his spade when Mary arrived back in the field. Smiling at one another they sat under the hill for their meal. It was the same as their breakfast, tea and bread and butter.

"Ah," said Martin, when he had taken a long draught of tea from his mug, "is there anything in this world as fine as eating dinner out in the open like this after doing a good morning's work? There, I have done two ridges and a half. That's more than any man in the village could do. Ha!" And he looked at his wife proudly.

"Yes, isn't it lovely," said Mary, looking at the black ridges wistfully. She was just munching her bread and but-

ter. The hurried trip to the village and the trouble of getting the tea ready had robbed her of her appetite. She had to keep blowing at the turf fire with the rim of her skirt, and the smoke nearly blinded her. But now, sitting on that grassy knoll, with the valley all round glistening with fresh seaweed and a light smoke rising from the freshly turned earth, a strange joy swept over her. It overpowered that other feeling of dread that had been with her during the morning.

Martin ate heartily, revelling in his great thirst and his great hunger, with every pore of his body open to the pure air. And he looked around at his neighbours' fields boastfully, comparing them with his own. Then he looked at his wife's little round black head and felt very proud of having her as his own. He leaned back on his elbow and took her hand in his. Shyly and in silence, not knowing what to say and ashamed of their gentle feelings, for peasants are always ashamed of feeling refined, they finished eating and still sat hand in hand looking away into the distance. Everywhere the sowers were resting on little knolls, men, women and children sitting in silence. And the great calm of nature in spring filled the atmosphere around them. Everything seemed to sit still and wait until midday had passed. Only the gleaming sun chased westwards at a mighty pace, in and out through white clouds.

Then, in a distant field an old man got up, took his spade and began to clean the earth from it with a piece of stone. The rasping noise carried a long way in the silence. That was the signal for a general rising all along the little valley. Young men stretched themselves and yawned. They walked slowly back to their ridges.

Martin's back and his wrists were getting a little sore, and Mary felt that if she stooped again over her seeds that her neck would break, but neither said anything and soon they had forgotten their tiredness in the mechanical movement of their bodies. The strong smell of the upturned earth acted like a drug on their nerves.

In the afternoon, when the sun was strongest, the old men of the village came out to look at their people sowing. Martin's grandfather, almost bent double over his thick

stick, stopped in the lane outside the field and, groaning loudly, he leaned over the fence.

"God bless the work," he called wheezily.

"And you, grandfather," replied the couple together, but they did not stop working.

"Ha!" muttered the old man to himself. "Ha! He sows well and that woman is good, too. They are beginning well."

It was fifty years since he had begun with his Mary, full of hope and pride, and the merciless soil had hugged them to its bosom ever since each spring without rest. But he did not think of that. The soil gives forgetfulness. Only the present is remembered in the spring, even by the aged who have spent their lives tilling the earth; so the old man, with his huge red nose and the spotted handkerchief tied around his skull under his black soft felt hat, watched his grandson work and gave him advice.

"Don't cut your sods so long," he would wheeze, "you are putting too much soil on your ridge."

"Ah, woman! Don't plant a seed so near the edge. The stalk will come out sideways.

And they paid no heed to him.

"Ah," grumbled the old man, "in my young days, when men worked from morning till night without tasting food, better work was done. But of course it can't be expected to be the same as it was. The breed is getting weaker. So it is."

Then he began to cough in his chest and hobbled away to another field where his son Michael was working.

By sundown Martin had five ridges finished. He threw down his spade and stretched himself. All his bones ached and he wanted to lie down and rest.

"It's time to be going home, Mary," he said.

Mary straightened herself, but she was too tired to reply. She looked at Martin wearily and it seemed to her that it was a great many years since they had set out that morning. Then she thought of the journey home and the trouble of feeding the pigs, putting the fowls into their coops and getting the supper ready and a momentary flash of rebellion against the slavery of being a peasant's wife crossed her

mind. It passed in a moment. Martin was saying, as he dressed himself:

"Hal My soul from the devil, it has been a good day's work. Five ridges done, and each one of them as straight as a steel rod. Begob, Mary, it's no boasting to say that ye might well be proud of being the wife of Martin Delaney. And that's not saying the whole of it, my girl. You did your share better than any woman in Inverara could do it this blessed day."

They stood for a few moments in silence looking at the work they had done. All her dissatisfaction and weariness vanished from Mary's mind with the delicious feeling of comfort that overcame her at having done this work with her husband. They had done it together. They had planted seeds in the earth. The next day and the next and all their lives, when spring came they would have to bend their backs and do it until their hands and bones got twisted with rheumatism. But night would always bring sleep and forgetfulness.

As they walked home slowly Martin walked in front with another peasant talking about the sowing, and Mary walked behind, with her eyes on the ground, thinking.

Cows were lowing at a distance.

BANISHED¹

By CON O'LEARY

(From *The Manchester Guardian*)

AT a station bookstall in Liverpool an old fellow, shabby but well set, with a pirate face and leaning on a black-thorn, asked for the very paper I was after, and shuffled away. The bookstall clerk spoke with the accent of the Liverpool Irish, and as he served me he said:

"That's a coincidence. Two customers for the Dublin *Liberator* at the one moment. And you might be a Republican and he might be looking for you. He's one of the old R. I. C."

"A police pensioner?"

"Wouldn't you know it? Sergeant Cuffe, of Tobarneering—know where that is?"

"A hot place, always."

"He had to quit. Liverpool is full of them. The Free State doesn't want them, won't have them. Nobody wants them. They've a couple of pounds a week pension, I think, and they're full of their grievances. But they're Irish in a queer way—always up here first thing to get an Irish paper."

I took away my *Liberator*. I was reading it as I went along, and I stumbled into Cuffe, who was reading his. We got talking, cautiously, trying to avoid politics, but, of course, we came round to them. Gradually he laid his suspicion aside and worked himself into that mood when men are fired beyond all caring by the conviction of the words they hear themselves speak.

"They ordered me out of the old country as if they'd made it," he said. "Twenty-four hours they gave me. In

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a way I was glad to be made go. Life was purgatory to me so long as I wore that tunic."

"So De Valera ordered you to quit?" Give a hesitating man a well-known name that he may embody his wrath.

"He did not, then. It was my own son Denis gave me the road."

"Your son?"

"Don't you credit a peeler's son might be as hot-tempered a boy as any of the bunch.

"But to banish his own father—a policeman's son?"

"It was his orders. Anyhow, I was out hunting for him. It was my orders. Maybe we were both great fools to be said by others, taking no account of flesh and blood. I might have shot him if he resisted—who knows? If he'd let me take him I'd have clapped the handcuffs on him and brought him to the military, and he'd have been hanged."

"Oh, sergeant, not that!"

"Didn't he slay comrades of my own, fathers of his chums? Didn't he burn me out of my barracks? Would he have spared me if I'd shed the blood of men he idolised? He was a schoolmaster, and he learned strange notions. Books and company, they fashioned him, and made a rebel out of the peeler's son. We hunted him out of his school, and then he took to his moonlighting. I did my duty and he went his way. Anyhow, it did for the pair of us."

"I can see you are fond of him when all is said."

"I *was* fond of him. Flesh and blood, man—flesh and blood. I tried to lift him to a better station than his father. I might have sent him to the depot and made him a policeman, and he'd be living here today, but no better off than myself."

"You met him face to face in the thick of it?"

"I was out hunting for him, I tell you. He lepped out of the ditch in front of the ambush prepared for me—I'll not forget that. He held up his revolver, but he wouldn't look me in the face. You're an ould man and I'll spare your life he says. I reason with him. Ah, he says, you betrayed Ireland, but she'll get back on you, because you

begat a rebel. Promise me now to take that coat off you, he says, or you're a dead man. Where did you get the stuff in you, I say, and to make me out a coward? Shoot away, I bid him. If I did, he says, my name would be in history. Well, he says, if you won't go I'll drive you. And he goes away cursing. It was hell after that, and we all had to go."

"Did they get him?"

"Not we. But after they had got rid of us all they went on fighting among themselves, and he was killed. His own comrades slew Denis Cuffe, the peeler's son."

"He is dead?"

"I read it on this platform in the *Liberator*. Nothing much, as if it was an ould sheep was after dying. It was a hard thing to read in a strange country. I looked in their faces, and they were thinking of something else. He meant well, but he was foolish. And I wonder which of the two of us was right."

The old fellow wiped his eyes with a great red handkerchief. Passengers hurried to and from the trains. There was rolling of trucks, the toot of motors, whistles, and the banging of gates.

"He died, and there was no more to him in Ireland. But down the Haymarket in my lodgings the three of us—those decent men yonder, Sergeant Costello and Constable Roche—held an American wake for him."

The men he indicated had us "under observation." Shabby and sluggish men, but their idle strength, their undertones, their searching glance—I would have known them for Royal Irish anywhere. How solemnly and furtively they would have managed the wake.

"We prayed for him and for the misfortunate country, and for a while Roche would not join to that. And they'll be saying in Ireland that Dennis Cuffe was a bad brood anyhow. And he gave up father and mother to be with them. And I wouldn't give up. Maybe he knows the rights and wrongs of it now. And may the Lord forgive us our trespasses. Amen."

Cuffe, Costello, and Roche talking of Ireland that despised them and reading their *Liberators*! And the prayer for Ireland that Roche would not join in for a bit! Their

fault was not cast in their teeth until they were too old to change. Perhaps Ireland will take them back some day. A nation is not all pantheon, but asylum and infirmary too.

I went to my train. Costello and Roche moved up to Cuffe, and together they went towards Haymarket.

THE BEAUTIFUL SEA

By T. F. POWYS

(From *The New Leader*)

MR. DAY, the pastor, always believed that if only Mrs. Moggs could be persuaded to leave her little shop, that was also the village post office, upon a Sunday or any holiday, and go down and look at the sea, her soul's salvation would be sure to follow such a visit.

"Her soul must feel sorrowful," Mr. Day would remark, "amongst all this starch and boot polish, it must long to get away, at least for an hour or two, from so many balls of string and pen wipers."

Whenever Mr. Day went to the Dodderdown shop, stepping carefully upon the stone path in winter, so as to avoid the puddles that lay here and there where the stones were broken, he would say very earnestly, after paying for his stamps: "You ought to go and look at the beautiful sea, Mrs. Moggs." "Oh, it's quite enough for me," Mrs. Moggs would reply, "to hear the waves roar, so I have no wish to go and look at them."

Sometimes Mr. Day would describe the sea. "It's as beautiful as the blue sky," he would say, "and its colours are heavenly and are exactly like"—and Mr. Day would look excitedly around him—"those pretty sweets on your top shelf."

"But it's a long way to the sea?"

"Only half a mile," Mr. Day would reply.

Mrs. Moggs was tidiness itself, nothing was ever out of place in her shop, and she always knew exactly where to lay her hands upon anything that was wanted. Her round face was pleasant and friendly, and two fine grey curls hung down on each side of her head like pretty bells. Whenever

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Mrs. Moggs shook her head these bells would shake, too, and Betty Pring used to say, when Mrs. Moggs told her that there were no more sweets in the bottle, that "she's bells were a-ringing."

One spring day the pastor brought to Mrs. Moggs a present of two white mice. "I thought you might like to play with them," he said, "when you feel lonely, though they're nowhere near as beautiful as the sea."

"Oh, I'm sure the sea's nothing like so lovely," said Mrs. Moggs, and put the mice into a drawer where they could be happy. "They'll do nicely there," she said, "and they can't hurt the postal orders, because I never put them into that drawer."

Everyone in Dodderdown admired the white mice that Mr. Day had given to Mrs. Moggs, who said they were more beautiful than the sea.

Although nearly every day Mrs. Moggs' round kindly face glowed with content, sometimes a day would come when she looked timid and careworn, and this always happened when the postmaster from the town rudely pushed open the shop door and came in with his questions.

His questions were always about the money, and he would look hard at Mrs. Moggs as he questioned her, as though he was sure that she had done something with the stamps or the orders that she shouldn't have done.

"If ever you allow anyone to owe you for a stamp you'll get yourself into trouble," Mr. Hunt, the postmaster, would say crossly.

Mrs. Moggs would look timidly into the face of her inquisitor, as if she fully expected him to tell her the very next moment to go to the workhouse, that was in Mrs. Moggs' idea the very nearest thing in England to a torture chamber.

Sometimes when he had brought Mrs. Moggs almost to tears, and the happy ringing of her bells to a sad silence, the postmaster would ask in a grand breezy way, copied exactly from Squire Blewberry—as he stretched out his stockinged legs in imitation of the same fine personage—"how far off was the sea?" Before answering his question Mrs. Moggs would perhaps hand a paper of pepper to Betty

Pring, who had stood in the shop doorway asking repeatedly for shoe laces.

"Oh, Mr. Day is always talking about the sea," Mrs. Moggs would answer nervously, "but I have never been there, you know, so I cannot tell how far off it is. Oh dear, I believe I gave Betty pepper instead of laces—but she's gone away now."

Whenever Mrs. Moggs had a bad dream, it would always take the form of some loss or other connected with the stamps, or the postal orders, and in the winter nights when the winds shook the ivy, or when in summer the great moon peeped in upon her, she would awake in terror, hearing Mr. Hunt in the grand bullying voice that he always used to inferiors, telling her, who was the kindest old woman in the world, that she was a thief and a liar. She didn't mind the thief so much, for she remembered one, mentioned in the Bible, who died in God's company and with a sure promise of Paradise; but she couldn't bear the thought of being called a "liar."

Mr. Hunt would always shout that word out so loudly in her dream, that Mrs. Moggs would awake all in a tremble, and afterwards she would think of all the fine things Mr. Day had said about the beautiful sea in order to compose herself to sleep again.

It was now summer, and Mr. Day was standing upon the yellow sands and wishing that he could persuade Mrs. Moggs to come and look at the sea. The sea looked so beautiful and clear that Mr. Day could see little fish swimming in it, and coloured stones that shone down at the bottom.

"If only she would come," said Mr. Day, "I feel sure that her soul would leap and cry out for eternity."

The pastor looked farther away, to where the sea and sky met one another.

"Her soul would not stay only as far as her eyes can see, but it would rush on until the glory of God is reached," he said.

In the shop Mrs. Moggs allowed Betty Pring to take the little white mouse called Tony in both her hands and to kiss it.

"'E be pretty and tickly," said Betty, "but mayn't I take up little Gertie too?"

Mrs. Moggs shook her head, making her bells ring merrily, and smiled at Betty and whispered, "that she believed Gertie was making a nest so that she mustn't be disturbed."

"But one day I'll give you a tiny one just like Tony," said Mrs. Moggs, handing Betty the stamp she had called for but without troubling her for the money.

"That will do tomorrow," said Mrs. Moggs, and her bells rang again.

Mrs. Moggs awoke the next morning very hopeful and happy; she believed that when she went downstairs and peeped into a certain drawer she would see little baby mice. But this wasn't the only reason for her happiness; there was another that gave Mrs. Moggs pleasure, which was that the postmaster had apparently forgotten the village.

"Perhaps," thought Mrs. Moggs, showing in her thought the innocence of her nature, "he will never come again."

Mrs. Moggs dressed herself slowly, and stood before the glass and shook her curls and listened, and she thought she heard bells ringing.

When she looked into the drawer to see how many mice were born she counted seven. She was so glad to see them that she hardly noticed that the mice had bitten a hole in the other drawer where her stamps and postal orders were kept. But when she wiped her glasses and looked more closely at the nest she saw that it was made up of little bits of coloured paper. Mrs. Moggs started; a large motor car had drawn up at her door and a man was stepping out of it.

Mrs. Moggs turned very pale, as Mr. Hunt, in his noisiest manner, came into the shop, and at once demanded of Mrs. Moggs an account of the stamps and orders that she had sold.

While Mrs. Moggs looked for her books Betty Pring opened the door and holding out some pennies she said, "These are for the stamps we owe for, Mrs. Moggs."

Mr. Hunt looked fiercely at Betty, who dropped all the pennies.

"Yes, I see," said Mr. Hunt, glancing at the figures, and now bring me what you have in stock, please."

"But where are the rest of them," asked the postmaster, after he had counted what Mrs. Moggs brought to him.

"The mice," Mrs. Moggs began trembling and looked extremely guilty.

"You're a liar," shouted Mr. Hunt.

Mrs. Moggs remembered the sea. The shop faded, and Mr. Hunt went as a bad dream goes, and before her was the sea as Mr. Day, the pastor, had described it to her.

Mr. Hunt was gone from Doddertown, but what exactly he had said to her she did not know, though the one shameful word had been plainly spoken; and even Betty Pring, who had been looking through the window, had heard it, too.

Mrs. Moggs fetched her bonnet and cloak.

In the lane she met Mr. Day, who was stepping upon the stone path just as carefully as if the winter puddles were still there. The pastor stopped and held up his hands in astonishment and wonder.

"I am going to the beautiful sea," said Mrs. Moggs, nodding her head while her bells rang. . . .

DEATH¹

By DOROTHY RICHARDSON

(From *The Weekly Westminster*)

THIS was death this time, no mistake. Her cheeks flushed at the indecency of being seen, dying and then dead. If only she could get it over and lay herself out decent before anyone came in to see and meddle. Mrs. Gworsh winning, left out there in the easy world, coming in to see her dead and lay her out and talk about her. . . . While there's life there's hope. Perhaps she wasn't dying. Only afraid. People can be so mighty bad and get better. But no. Not after that feeling rolling up within, telling her in words, her whom it knew, that this time she was going to be overwhelmed. That was the beginning, the warning and the certainty. To be more and more next time, any minute, increasing till her life flowed out for all to see. Her heart thumped. The rush of life beating against the walls of her body, making her head spin, numbed the pain and brought a mist before her eyes. Death. What she'd always feared so shocking, and put away. But no one knows what it is, how awful beyond everything, till they're in for it. Nobody knows death is this rush of life in all your parts.

The mist cleared. Her face was damp. The spinning in her head had ceased. She drew a careful breath. Without pain. Some of the pain had driven through her without feeling. But she was heavier. It wasn't gone either. Only waiting. She saw the doctor on his way. Scorn twisted her lips against her empty gums. Scores of times she'd waited for him. Felt him drive fear away. Joked. This time he'd say nothing. Watch, for her secret life to come up and out. When his turn came he'd know what it was like letting your life out; and all of them out there. No good

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telling. You can't know till you're in for it. They're all in for it, rich and poor alike. No help. The great enormous creature driving your innards up, what nobody knows. What *you* don't know. . . . Life ain't worth death.

It's got to be stuck, shame or no . . . but how do you do it?

She lay still and listened for footsteps. They knew next door by now. That piece would never milk Snowdrop dry. Less cream, less butter. Everything going back. Slip-slop, go as you please, and never done. Where'd us be to now if I hadn't? That's it. What they don't think of. Slip-slop. Grinning and singing enough to turn the milk. I've got a tongue. I know it. You've got to keep on and keep on at them. Or nothing done. I been young, but never them silly ways. Snowdrop'll go back; for certain. . . .

But I shan't ever *see* it no more . . . the thought flew lifting through her mind. See no more. Work no more. Worry no more. Then what had been the good of it? Why had she gone on year in year out since Tom died and she began ailing, tramping all weathers up to the field, toiling and aching, and black as thunder most times. What was the good? Nobody knew her. Tom never had. And now there was only that piece downstairs, and what she did didn't matter any more. Except to herself, and she'd go on being slip-slop; not knowing she was in for death that makes it all one whatever you do. Good and bad they're all dying and don't know it's the most they've got to do.

Her mind looked back up and down her life. Tom. What a fool she'd been to think him any different. Then when he died she'd thought him the same as at first, and cried because she'd let it all all slip in the worries. Little Joe. Tearing her open, then snuggled in her arms, sucking. And all outside bright and peaceful; better than the beginning with Tom. But they'd all stop if they knew where it led. Joe, and his wife, and his little ones, in for all of it, getting the hard of it now, and death waiting for them. She could tell them all now what it was like, all of them, the squire, all the same. All going the same way, rich and poor.

The Bible was right, "Remember now thy Creator in the

days of thy youth." What she had always wanted. She had always wanted to be good. Now it was too late. Nothing mattering, having it all lifted away, made the inside of you come back as it was at the first, ready to begin. Too late. Shocking she had thought it when parson said prepare for death, live as if you were going to die tonight. But it's true. If every moment was your last on earth you could be yourself. You'd dare. Everybody would dare. People is themselves when they are children, and not again till they know they'm dying. But conscience knows all the time. I've a heavy bill for all my tempers. God forgive me. But why should He? He was having his turn now, anyhow, with all this dying to do. Death must be got through as life had been, just somehow. But how?

When the doctor had gone she knew she was left to do it alone. While there's life there's hope. But the life in her was too much smaller than the great weight and pain. He made her easier, numb. Trying to think and not thinking. Everything unreal. The piece coming up and down-stairs like something in another world. Perhaps God would let her go easy. Then it was all over? Just fading to nothing with everything still to do. . . .

The struggle came unexpectedly. She heard her cries, and then the world leapt upon her and grappled, and even in the midst of the agony of pain was the surprise of her immense strength. The strength that struggled against the huge stifling, the body that leapt and twisted against the heavy darkness, a shape within her shape, that she had not known. Her unknown self rushing forward through all her limbs to fight. Leaping out and curving in a great sweep away from where she lay to the open sill, yet pinned back, unwrenchable from the bed. Back and back she slid, down a long tunnel at terrific speed, cool, her brow cool and wet, with wind blowing upon it. Darkness in front. Back and back into her own young body, alone. In front on the darkness came the garden, the old garden in April, the crab-apple blossom, all as it was before she began, but brighter. . . .

CREAKING SARAH AND LAUGHING SAL¹

By HELEN ROTHAM

(From *The Nation and the Athenæum*)

LIKE a doll which the manipulator has laid on one side to await its turn in the squalid puppet show to which it belongs, Creaking Sarah lay stiffly across a bench in the public park; whilst Laughing Sal danced with uncouth, wide-flung movements on the pathway in front of her, snapping her fingers in a vain attempt to gain Creaking Sarah's attention and applause.

Creaking Sarah never paid attention to anything or anybody that moved. The dull mirrors of her fixed, unblinking eyes reflected passing objects as a muddy pool in a road may catch the shadow of a distant, winging bird, but conveyed no more to the stagnant brain behind them than a clock-face conveys to the wheels which move the pointing fingers round it. Creaking Sarah was conscious of only one thing in the world—the bony framework of her body, which was so inadequately hidden by its grotesque and sordid mask of flesh.

From the time they were first formed within the yielding darkness of her mother's womb, Creaking Sarah's bones had been governed by one single instinct—the desire to stretch themselves out as they would ultimately lie, rigid, and divested of their useless flesh, in the dark, unyielding earth.

On the day she was born, Creaking Sarah had been laid, a silent, stiff, and angular baby, in the rough wooden sugar-box which was to serve her as cradle; and in every clumsy joint was hidden the knowledge that as it was at the beginning of life, so it would be at the end; that life for her was

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but a spasmodic disarrangement of wires along a jerking pathway between two boxes. No passing mood, no change of time or season, ever disturbed the meaningless quiescence of creaking Sarah. For her the days and the nights were but the bones, and the gaps between the bones, of the corpse of time which lay rotting in corruption within the box-like alleys and courts where she moved and had her being; and laughter and tears are for flesh and soul, two things of which Creaking Sarah had no consciousness. Only occasionally, and at long intervals, did she leave the cramped and crowded byways which she knew and understood, for the wide spaces of the parks. She did not like the parks; they troubled her eyes with expanses she could not visualize even whilst she regarded them, and gave her a vague sensation of fear and uncertainty. She moved through them like the inner spectre of a city's guilty dream, her eyeballs distended with the horror of a sleep-walker who clutches at a naked sword-blade to save himself from falling to his death in a smiling, mossy valley a thousand feet below. She was never at peace unless her horizon was bounded by a barrier which she could touch without its yielding to the pressure; and her only moments of comfort in the parks were those when, stretched across a bench under a tree, she listened to the branches creaking in the wind. That sound was a language which Creaking Sarah understood.

It was Laughing Sal who sometimes managed to drag her from the squalid streets to the public parks. Laughing Sal had been that unwanted, uncared-for thing which the world has named a "love child." Conceived with a drunken laugh, and born of sodden flesh that collapsed with a terrified whimper as she struggled with it for life, Laughing Sal had been kicked and beaten from starving, neglected childhood into imbecile maturity. Never still, dancing wherever she could find space to fling out her clumsy limbs and heavy feet, Laughing Sal grinned and chattered through the vicissitudes of heat and cold, of wet and dry, which constituted the only divisions she knew of life. Never having eaten quite enough, she was unaware that she was eternally hungry, and remained unaffected by anything but cold and wet.

Unlike Creaking Sarah, she loved the comparative freedom of the parks, where she could send her smiles and her incessant chatterings down wide green vistas which she knew instinctively held nothing inimical to herself. The moving leaves and the flying shadows on the grass, which afflicted her companion with an actual physical uneasiness, were a delight to Laughing Sal. The wandering images of her own mind, which were fretted by the concretely defined limits of the streets until they took on the feverish hue of a sick child's delirium, found a soothing affinity in this shifting pattern of shadows. These silent, seemingly purposeless movements were but another aspect of her own confused and endless babble; and if they were as much a puzzle to her as everything else at which she looked, at least they were a puzzle in which she herself had a place, and in which she had a part of her own to play. Whereas the rows of tall, stiff houses cut into her nerves like a saw, and pushed her for ever away into an aching and haunted wilderness.

On this particular day she had experienced even more difficulty than usual in getting Creaking Sarah to leave the narrow, stuffy streets, where they shared a noisome kennel with two other outcasts as desolate as themselves. Creaking Sarah's feet had dragged more heavily and more slowly than ever over the hot pavements; every step she took had the appearance of being a laborious effort to extricate herself from the grip of a hidden force beneath, whilst her eyes occasionally rolled back as if seeking to follow the movements of some strange and sinister creature suddenly set adrift on the dark sea of her inner being.

Laughing Sal grinned and chuckled as she met the eyes of the passers-by, who for the most part gave her glances of good-natured tolerance, which changed into sharp aversion as they fell upon her companion. Neither Laughing Sal nor Creaking Sarah, however, was in any way affected by the bearing or the behaviour of those who, they would have been surprised to learn, were their fellow-beings. Creaking Sarah was under the dominion of a hidden force which was sufficiently strong to put an iron barrier between herself and all flesh; and Laughing Sal felt more akin to the formless shadows on the grass than to these strange crea-

tures, who, whilst bearing an outward resemblance to herself, disconcerted her and removed themselves to illimitable and incomprehensible distances by the fact that they all moved as if they had some definite object in view.

No one had ever cared to fathom the mystery which had brought these two outcasts together and held them fast. Probably Creaking Sarah was unaware of any bond between them, and would not have felt a blank if her companion had suddenly disappeared out of her life; but Laughing Sal, imbecile and distraught though she was, was half-conscious of obeying some blind instinct when she pushed and dragged Creaking Sarah into the open spaces she herself loved. That same blind instinct had struggled within her when she fought and conquered a drunken mother on the threshold of the world.

Now she danced in cumbersome fashion in front of Creaking Sarah, and even gave her an occasional clumsy kick in her efforts to awaken her attention. But Creaking Sarah remained immovable in the exact position in which she had first placed herself when they halted at this tree-shaded bench. Her rigid body, stretched out ignobly and without any softening curves, in the chequered pattern of sunlight and shade, was like a skeleton embodying the voiceless protest of centuries of murdered dreams. Her eyes were rolled quite back, as if caught and held by the hidden creature adrift on the dark and secret sea behind them. The leaves above her head stirred gently in a breeze which was not sufficiently strong to move their branches, and the traffic of a great city rolled outside the railing fifty yards away. A policeman strolling past looked, hesitated, looked again, and came close to Creaking Sarah. He bent over her and touched her, then quickly stood upright again.

"Look 'ere," he said, looking at Laughing Sal in horrified expostulation, for he was young and still open to impressions; "look 'ere. Wot d'you think yer doing, chucking yerself about like that in front of 'er?—she's dead."

"Eh?" said Laughing Sal.

"She's dead," repeated the policeman. "You jest look 'ere, she's as stiff as a board already. Why, she must 'a bin dead for hours."

Laughing Sal, for whom life held nothing but heat and cold, wet and dry, and who, in consequence, could not tell him that forty years of life had moulded Creaking Sarah into something which ten minutes of death could not change nor beautify, grinned and chattered at the moving leaves and the flying shadows, and went on dancing.

But Creaking Sarah's bones had heard and understood, and knew that at last they had come into their own.

AT THE MICKLEHAM ARMS¹

By HELEN SIMPSON

(From *The Weekly Westminster*)

WE all turned to stare at the old lady as she came into the bar. She held in her respectably gloved hand a small tight bunch of mignonette, whose green heads protruding from a stiff funnel of newspaper instantly filled the room with an incongruous scent. She had a pink, humorous face, like some politician of the older school; and she eyed her bitter against the light with a gesture and pose of the head that would have dignified a glass of port reflected from a mahogany table. We did not speak to her, but regarded her with disapproval as a mere casual adventurer within our boundaries; she was not disconcerted. She dwelt apart, in a rosy atmosphere not to be dulled by our antagonism. She took a draught of bitter, only a mouthful or two, with deliberation; then, setting down the glass, with a word and a glance she gathered us, still hostile, into her circle.

"'Ot," she said, and fanned herself with the mignonette. We looked at each other, undecided. She continued easily, "It's the pore 'orses I'm sorry for; 'uman bein's can look after theirselves."

A further draught of bitter drove home this point, and as she lowered the glass she paused, fixing a compelling gaze upon the lady in mauve.

"They ought to 'ave 'ats," she concluded, and set the glass down. The lady in mauve, though particular as a rule, was roused to speech by this absurdity.

"Their yers is the wrong shape," she said coldly, and moved in her chair so that her profile was obscured by a drooping purple plume.

¹ Copyright, 1924, by Helen Simpson.

"They 'as them abroad," insisted the old lady. "In Rome." I opened my mouth to ask a question, but the old lady broke covert in another direction.

"I'm seventy-six," she announced abruptly, "but I seen a lot."

"Ah," said the lady in mauve.

"We're Victorian girls, me and 'er," continued the old lady, accepting her as an ally on the strength of this single ejaculation. "Victorian. She kep' us in order. One 'usbin', and stick to 'im, that was 'er motter. Not one or two, like they 'as nowadays. But there wasn't none of these Ladies' Bars then."

"When I was a girl," said the lady in mauve, confidentially, "I used to like a drop o' stout. For the matter o' that I do still. But if you'll believe me, I never could 'ave it in peace. I used to slip in to the Colville down in Jersey Street, and golp it down, and then out again as if I was shot. There wasn't no ladies in the bars then." She tossed her plume, and we all felt that civilisation had advanced since those bleak days. We sipped more genteelly, and looked more kindly upon the intruder, who once again, by the mysterious quality of her smile, gathered our attention. She leaned forward.

"We knew a thing or two, for all that," said she. "Shh!"

Evidently she considered silence the better part. We took the hint, rapidly considering what the thing or two might be.

"But I like to see young people enjoying life, she continued. "That's what it was give 'em for. "Nobody's young for long. But the memories"—she lifted a compact hand—"the memories is sweet."

"Ah," the lady in mauve agreed. "I done most things——"

"Been to Rome?" the old lady enquired brusquely.

I waited, breathless. Now we were coming to it.

"No, I 'ave not," the lady in mauve answered with hauteur. "As I was saying——"

But the old lady was too quick for her.

"I been to Rome," she announced. "Seventeen year ago it was, with my son. 'E went on business. That was the

year when they 'ad the great eruption of Vesuvius—'eard I was coming, I expec'." We laughed, but the lady in mauve finished her stout and sat with a fixed expression, cheated of her reminiscence.

"I was alone a lot," said the old lady, "but I didn't care. No. I used to go roamin'—roamin' in Rome. One day I walked out to where they said there was twenty-six miles o' marble under the earth. *Outside* Rome, that was. Now mind"—she addressed us with sudden severity, sketching a Parliamentary gesture with a lifted hand—"pay attention to this. This is gospel I'm telling you, not paper."

We composed ourselves to listen, but in that moment the landlord had crossed her field of vision. She accosted him.

"Guvnor," she asked, "what's the matter with you? You ain't smilin'. Ain't you well?"

The potentate paused, astounded, his mouth drooping like the red flaps of skin beneath his jaws. At last he answered briefly, in his throaty voice:

"I'm all right; much the same," and turned to survey the ranked bottles.

"You don't look ser charmin' as usual," said the old lady, with a wink at us. The back of his neck flushed. He moved away almost hastily to loom above a masculine audience which took him seriously. The old lady's eye followed his retreat, and there was a gleam of triumph in it. She turned to us once more.

"As I was saying," she went on lightly, "I went out there to this place, what's this they called it: outside of Rome, it was? I 'ad my seventieth birthday in Rome," she added in an aside to me, seventeen years ago. Shh!"

She resumed her narrative.

"And when I'd gone something like 'arf a mile, what should I see but a sort of little statue. A little bit of a thing it was—so 'igh."

She measured the height with her hand.

"And there was writing on it. In English and Italian. And what do you think it said? You don't know? Well, I'll tell you. That's what I come for. It said, 'This is the spot where Nero stood when 'e watched the burnin' of Rome.'"

She sat back in her chair, and we stared at her and at each other, over our glasses of bitter and stout and gin.

"That's what it said," she continued, "'the spot where Nero stood.' I thought to myself, 'I've 'eard of you, you nasty feller,' and so, then, what do you think I did? I was wearing an English pair o' boots—boots I'd brought with me a month before all this 'appened I'm telling you—a military 'eel, they 'ad—and I thought, I'll put my good ole English boot up 'ere on top o' this statue where Nero stood. I could do it then; might 'ave a bit o' difficulty now. And so I upped with my foot, and I put my boot right on it. And I thought, This'll be something, when I get back, to tell the girls and make 'em laugh. Military 'eels, they 'ad."

She mused for a moment.

"Many's the one I've told that story to," she said. "If I've told it to one, I've told it to 'undreds. It always makes 'em laugh. And the cleverer they is, and the more well-educated they is, the more they laugh. Ah, well."

We sat spellbound. The old lady, infallibly recognising that the moment had come, gripped her tube of mignonette and rose.

"I'll be going now," she said, and laid one stumpy finger delicately against her nose; over it she cocked at us an eye at once deprecating and naughty. "Shh!" she said, and went.

As the doors swung behind her I felt a sudden sense of loss. Good company is so rare, and this had been mature and excellent as a vintage wine. But she was irrevocably gone. In the bar nobody knew her; the dark, jostling streets outside held my treasure most securely. And since she was an artist I knew that she would never come to that Ladies' Bar again.

UNDERGROWTH¹

By EDITH SITWELL

(From *The Golden Hind*)

IT was in the year 1893 that Boniface Romartin finally sank into clay. The house that had been his hard outer shell was in some indescribable way changed—perhaps because his semi-paralytic body, and the soft, limaceous voice that was his means of expressing the Vacuum, had shrivelled away into nothingness. He had been a man unremarkable in every way, excepting for his gift of moulding and hardening all the flesh that came under his power—animals and human beings—into gold, and also for the fact that both his thumbs were so huge in size and heavy that they seemed not to belong to his rather small plump hands. His eyes seemed pale grey membranes, stretching over an unknown tract of country; and the viscous quality of his personality left a shining trail over everything near him; even the glistening dawn and evening seemed only the trail of him, when he was near. The soft outer covering of his flesh, personality, and voice, and the hard strata beneath it, turning all the surrounding material world to gold, as a snail gathers her surrounding world of dust and sand to form her shell, gave one an uncanny and terrifying feeling, as of the presence of some unknown, slug-like creature infinitely perverted by the inversion of its material being.

Romartin brought up his daughters with the greatest care, and Marthe, the eldest daughter, was never allowed any of the vanities or pleasures usual to a young girl. Dances were forbidden, and young company was discouraged. What Marthe felt about this was never known, as she was

¹ Copyright, 1924, by Edith Sitwell.

a girl given to a dank overgrowth of silence. She was always oddly inarticulate, and her principal mode of expression, when she was angry, was that of thrusting her head forward, and blinking with eyes that had grown suddenly dulled and narrowed. Perhaps she suffered, during the years in which her youth, dried and bleached like the skin of some vermin, stretched upon a rock after slaughter. Perhaps she hated the father and the circumstance that had done this to her, and, still more, the pretty sister who was only seventeen when that father died. But, if she hated these things, none knew it, for she rarely spoke. Only, after her father's death, her conscious rectitude walked in even narrower lines.

On the afternoon following the day of Boniface Romartin's funeral, his two daughters were sitting silently in the kitchen. Marthe, the eldest, was only thirty-one years of age, yet her youth was over, and she knew it. Her body and eyes had a stone-like carved appearance, intensely restricted and definite; but the coldness of these was belied by the animal character of her abundant and shapeless dull black hair. Her forceful voice seemed to abolish the framework of the person to whom she spoke, and to move the material world a little further off, till it fled in a blurred rout. Her speech was hateful for this reason. She inherited her father's curious hands.

Yvonne, the younger sister, was seventeen years old, and a pretty, plump, young person, shining and glistening like her father, but in a youthful and pleasing way. Her cheeks were dyed pink as the empty-tasting, the schoolgirlish fruits of summer, and her gold wheaten hair, dry and plaited like wheat, was cut in a fringe above pretty eyes, filled as some innocent country flower. Her voice pattered incessantly, like the wind patting fresh green leaves.

The two sisters sat together in the kitchen of their father's house, and the sun, that had crept into the house like a starved cat during their father's lifetime, suddenly shewed itself in all its furry, raw life, and stretched out a rough, savage tongue to lap up the silence—that slow-leaking tap. . . . Pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, the silence dripped. . . . Yvonne was frightened. . . . This was not the Marthe

she knew. She had changed the moment their father died. That raw, furry quality . . . those black fathomless eyes, the saurian, thick hide of meaninglessness that covered them. Marthe spoke, and her voice was like some terrifying atavism; it seemed like something brought from the infinitely buried and remote recesses of the ancestral soul. The syllables were huge and shapeless; in their blackness and stoniness they were as the statues brought from Easter Island. All she said was "Get the tea," and her eyes menaced Yvonne.

From that day Yvonne's life was changed. "You were spoilt during my father's time," said Marthe; "but one is not young and careless for ever; and there are more serious things in life than enjoyment. Flowers waste time: time costs money."

Yvonne was given very little of this precious commodity to waste in wandering by the threadbare black sea of winter, under the bear-dark sky, or to spend, when spring came again, in staring at the flowering trees, so like bride-cakes, with their formal shapes and their coating of insipid hard white sugar. Once, beneath those trees, a little snake reared its flat head and looked at her. The eyes fascinated her . . . they drew her nearer. Surely, too, she had seen them before? But where? It must have been in some forgotten dream. But a sudden sound disturbed the snake, and it slipped away through the clear, innocent, green grass, under the bride-cake tree.

It was a day between winter and spring; and a few curdled, sour, milky flakes of snow brought a feeling of reality, of the material world, back to Yvonne's mind as she walked along the lanes leading to the white farmhouse. There was nothing to look forward to . . . summer with its cotton-pillow clouds, the dusty heat wherein even the dead seemed to turn restlessly in their dull beds; the Martha-coloured scabious waving aimlessly in the fields, beneath trees whose leaves were pale and threadbare as cotton-machine lace. And then the annual Fair: the elephants whose hides are shabby and black as the winter seas; the jackals, with their paws like yellow cotton gloves hiding sharp scissors, and their look of eager watching, so

like that of newspaper reporters. What would happen if, in their impatient walk, they shook the bars of the cage too heavily, and these were broken and the jackals were free. Would they find their way to the graveyard? Would they dig for the rags of paper-thin flesh, hoping that the black pulse of the blood had left some message printed there, like a foul news-sheet among the empty castles of the bone?—No danger! they would not smell out the graveyard. There is nothing to smell, these people are not dead, for they were never living.

Then, too, there was the roundabout, a perpetual movement encircling the same pivot, there were the red velvet waves of the booths, a sea giving up its dead (tawdry emptinesses, husks of juiceless fruit, remembrances that none would buy); and there were the flat pastel tints of the mechanical pianos; even the sky seemed turned to hollow gilt gingerbread. The clowns, alas, were no more amusing than the village pastor; only they were dressed differently from him; the noses of the clowns and the pastor were red with hunger, but the clowns had added rouge to make theirs redder.

Even this would have meant some movement in the perfect stillness of Yvonne's life; but Marthe would not let her go to the Fair. "You should think of better things," she said.

Certainly there was nothing to look forward to, and Yvonne trudged home to help with the housework. But, when she reached the farm, it was evident that something had happened. Through the parlour window she could hear a loud voice, screaming with a kind of insane, angry delight; the voice had the double-tinted quality of a hen's voice. A second voice, drooping like a cock's comb, answered faintly. Yvonne raised the latch of the door and walked in. Marthe, her eyes dulled and narrowed (where had she seen eyes just like these, so lately), was standing with her head crouched forward, screaming at Jeanne, the little eighteen-year-old country servant, who leant trembling against the wall.

"You'll leave the house this very night," Marthe cackled. "I am not going to have this house polluted by the likes of you."

Indecipherable sound from Jeanne.

"You've got nowhere to go? What has that got to do with me? You can go to your proper place, the mud of the pond, for all I care."

Jeanne was going to have a baby, and Jeanne had got to go. So Jeanne, with her straggling fair hair, so like some poor humble country weed, and her eyes that were round and enquiring like a goose's eyes, went up to the box under the stars that she had called her home, and packed up her cotton dress and the black stuff dress that had gone white under the arms, and the pair of clumsy boots that had been worn into a dark chocolate-smooth consistency and a ridge in one sole, and the cheap hat that was bright and cheap as the crops of the mustard fields in summer. These she packed into her battered tin box, and then she sat down on the box and had a good cry beneath the straggling, weed-like stars, for she had only seven shillings wages, and she had no friends. Then the box was thrown out of the farm house, and she straggled out after it, to go to her "proper place, the mud of the pond," or anything or anywhere that was kind enough to take her.

Yvonne was sorry for her, but she did not dare intercede with Marthe on her behalf. She was frozen into an animal-like silence; and all the evening—a warm listless spring night, with a low-hung sky black and material as a woollen stocking—she sat with the album of photographs and "views" that formed, together with a prayer-book, the library of the farmhouse. Strange funeral effigies, flatter and more lifeless than the carved figures in a mausoleum, faced her from the book. Elderly men with mayfly whiskers; sharp-edged spinsters whose laughter once had trilled as shrill as the moon, and whose bodies, in these photographs, seem draped by the dust, beneath the curls that are like fibrous nutmegs that have grown a little dusty with time. Nothing remained now of these people but their names and the inhibitions they had placed upon the young; yet they were not flatter or more lifeless than the existence that had survived them. When Yvonne was a child, their living beings had seemed only as brightly coloured or dark pictures hung up on a wall, and their voices were to her

ears as disembodied as the east and the west winds—the one forbidding life, and the other accepting it faintly and with tears.

Boniface Romartin had once, nobody knew why, insinuated himself into Switzerland, and there were coloured "views" of this distressing country, to add dismay to the whole . . . Switzerland, which is not a country, but a state of mind . . . It was curiously harmonised with the materialism that lay as a hard stratum (hard, yet oozing with sentimentality) beneath the soft outer surface of Boniface Romartin's character. Yvonne thought with pleasure of Switzerland, wherein we are so quickly transplanted from the ancient and spiritual mysteries of the cold to the warmer and more trivial life which is the epitome of all the insults that the mind of man has offered to the Infinite. . . . Switzerland . . . Chalets like performing dogs going through their little tricks upon perilous planks bridging the eternal mountains. Human camels swinging between gorges, yodelling down miles of distorted throat; clouds that are carved like Rossini's operas; blue cotton lakes and women with mouths like red flannel frills; flowers that are large, wide-open and stupid, oozing with syrup that is thick and colourless as the sounds of a concertina. One can touch and smell and taste everything—excepting the inaccessible peaks of the mountains. No silence there! Yvonne enjoyed the thought of it. . . . Why should she have that uncomfortable feeling about Jeanne? . . . The creature deserved what had happened to her. "When I marry, I shall go to Switzerland for my honeymoon—if I marry, I should say." Marry? Go to Switzerland? How? When? There is nothing to do here—excepting wait on Marthe.

Yvonne went upstairs and lay in her narrow bed, that was cold, limp and unsatisfying as the sea. The sheets had the chalky white consistency of the cliffs of Dover; outside the window, a soundless wind was like a limitless dark gulf; and Yvonne lay dreamlessly. Where was Jeanne now, with her heavy dull boots, and, perhaps, a wolfish hunger?

Spring was flowing like music through the world; the faint primroses smelling of youth, hiding in their thick leathery shagreen leaves (so practical and sensible), made

to save them from the cold, faded, and were succeeded by lilies of the valley, blond as the tight curls of the little choristers upon holidays and saints' days. These in their turn were dying, when something else took their place in the mind of Yvonne, something that blew through the farmhouse like a sudden wind, strangling the resistance of Marthe, and blowing Yvonne out of her power.

It happened on a spring night that was dark, sharp and glittering as the boughs of a Christmas tree. The Curé was drinking coffee with the two sisters, and, in honour of his coming, Marthe had made cakes that were soft yet waxen in feeling, and brightly coloured as the begonias that still, in spite of Marthe's disapproval, grew squatly outside the kitchen window. A letter came for Marthe, and the writer was a young man, the son of Boniface Romartin's only sister. A small part of the land attached to the farm belonged to Madame Imbeyarde, and it was necessary for the son, as she was a widow, to visit his cousins preparatory to selling this. In due course, Henri Imbeyarde arrived, and proved to be a rather hirsute, grunting young man of but small charm. But he had a certain amount of money, he lived in Paris—that unattainable Paradise—he was kind to Yvonne, and she saw her chance and took it.

Unavailingly were Marthe's snake-eyes cast upon her. The two young people walked together by the saint-blue folds of the river, whilst Marthe was left at home. Every day she grew more green and poisonous, till she resembled those hooded plants that live, shunning the light of the sun, under the shadow of vast boughs; but nobody saw, and nobody cared. A month after Henri Imbeyarde's arrival at the farmhouse, he married Yvonne, in spite of all that Marthe could do or say to prevent it. Seeing that the marriage was inevitable, she ended by accepting the situation smilingly. She was left alone in the farmhouse, and the young people went to Paris.

Life at the farm was unchanged, and the shining trail of dawn and evening came and vanished like an echo; the moon seemed an empty white door, opening on to a hollow nothingness. Marthe went about her business in her close, crustacean, black dress, and the curious large thumb that

she had inherited from her father grew redder, perhaps from work.

The day of the wedding was a hot and bustling day of early summer: the sky seemed dry and withered as the palm-leaves that priests carry, and golden bells of light were ringing with an incessant din, from the sky, from the furry tents of the trees, from the sea. Yvonne bustled and fidgetted, her tongue clicking and rattling like the train, all the way to Paris. Her husband only grunted, and Yvonne in a moment of panic, looking at his sleek black hair, that grew too far down and too far across, and she thought: "of course, he is longing to be back in the mud again." But in a moment that thought was chased away by a flight of tall houses, flitting like swallows, with their white bellies and their grey roofs that were pointed like wings. When they reached Paris, Yvonne cried. She had expected to arrive on a night as deep-glowing and velvety as a bower of cinerarias. She had dreamed of coaches, flashing like rubies, sapphires and diamonds in the blaze of lights, each coach being surmounted by a coachman and six footmen wearing wigs as white and thick as the Polar snows. She had imagined palaces of glass through which she could peep at receptions wherein wineglasses and bottles like icebergs clash together, containing scarlet wines so feathered by the lights that they seem like birds of paradise inciting the mind to fly with them to far-off and enchanted regions. And would not she become a famous beauty at these same receptions? Was she not the wife of Henri Imbeyarde, and had he not a comfortable income?

But the streets were threadbare with rain, the houses seemed tattered with age, and the few smart ladies whom Yvonne could see wore clothes that were very different to her scabious-coloured cashmere, smocked and honeycombed.

The flat to which Yvonne was taken had the colour, the consistency and the smell of winter cabbage; and her mother-in-law made her feel at once unreal and too material. Madame Imbeyarde was like an aged sheep; her face had the dry plaster appearance of a sheep's face (that curious mouldy look that you find in certain towns made of plaster and cement—Karlsruhe, for instance), and it had, too, the

Stuart formation of a sheep's face. The tight, plaster-whitish curls of her fringe resembled a sheep's periwig, her eyes had a pale limpid transparency, and were round like bubbles; you could look into them and see their bottom: it was nothing but a little grey sand. She stammered painfully, in a cold, damp, bleating voice: "baa,-baa-a-a—." Yvonne had a glass of wine for dinner, and after this she perceived that Madame Imbeyarde was a very distinguished person. That good woman, on her part, perceived nothing. It was not her way. But an accent of frosty offence crept into her voice whenever she addressed her son. Madame Imbeyarde was principally a housekeeper; not a drop of vinegar could fall without her calculating the exact waste; but she was also "a great reader"; which meant that she read the newspaper from end to end, including the advertisements, and this in spite of the fact that five minutes afterwards she had forgotten everything that had made a windy, fluttering flight through her head.

Life was not what the young Madame Imbeyarde had expected; Paris was in reality nothing but the village from which she had sprung, only magnified in somebody's imagination; yet here, at least, was freedom from Marthe, and there were also things to be seen from the window. On the wet days of winter, for instance, there were the legs of the passing people, slanting movements, regular and black as the lines of the rain. Umbrellas hid the faces, so one could have no idea what those heads held, what thoughts budded like flowers or crept like snakes within the little boxes of their brains. But Yvonne did not care. "This is life," she thought. These people were moving; who cared what their thoughts were? Sometimes regiments passed, in rhythmical waves and with a ground-swell and architecture like that of the sea. All these people were not separate people, but one person, to Yvonne. They were empty clothes swaying upon the wind of spring. How could they suffer or be pleased, when she was pleased or suffering? There was only one life, and that Yvonne's.

Existence, with Yvonne, had become a kind of nervous tic. If she was not always bustling, chattering, moving, it seemed to her that she might as well be back in her native

village. In this occupation of turning everything into trivial noise, the next few years passed, alas, how uneventfully. Four children were born; flowers sprouted in the window-boxes, and died away again; her mother-in-law had bronchitis.

The great excitement in Yvonne's life was when her husband's married sister, Marie, came to dinner. This lady, according to Yvonne's lights, lived in the great world. She knew the wife of a *Député*. Madame Gobine was a lady of whom it might be said that it would always remain uncertain if she belonged to the mineral or vegetable kingdom, for she had the hard brilliant appearance of the one and the inevitability of the other. If a soul and a heart could be bought for money, and had a marketable value, she would certainly have had two of each; but in their present unsellable condition, she decided to do without both; and these remained the only possessions she lacked. Her voice, which clicked and wove incessantly like knitting needles, poured out thick and endless patterns of scandals in high life. Every married woman, it seemed, had a lover. Every man in a great position was on the point of being ruined for life through the machinations of a woman.

Yvonne was thrilled, but she was also shocked, and she looked at Madame Gobine with her pretty frilled eyes that were like a wild flower asking for more rain.

So the years passed, and Yvonne's Paris remained unrealised; it had to be seen through the plate-glass window of Madame Gobine's experience. But Yvonne was happy. She had grown fond of her husband, and the years, in destroying her prettiness, had brought her nearer to him. Her cheeks were mottled now, like her own country fritillaries, and her figure seemed to upholster a room with comfort; the chattering and bustling that had been pretty and amusing in a seventeen-year-old girl now seemed merely foolish; and Yvonne never spoke of anything but trivialities. But Henri was still fond of her in his slow-moving, grunting way.

Letters from Marthe had come occasionally, but they had grown rarer and rarer. The first letter, written in a square black handwriting, had reminded Yvonne of her

wifely duties, and of the fact that life is not pleasure, that the way of the wife is more arduous and toil-stricken than that of the old maid, and so on; all the other letters were made necessary by business.

But now, sixteen years after Yvonne's marriage, came a letter from Marthe, saying that she had left the farm, and had bought a house in a different part of the country. Would Yvonne go and stay with her for a little while, if she could leave her husband and children? It seemed that Marthe had been greatly disturbed by a particularly horrible murder that had recently taken place in the neighbourhood of the farm. Did Yvonne remember Jeanne? A labourer had taken pity on her wretchedness, and had married her. She was now the mother of several children, and it was the two youngest of these children, a boy and a girl, aged six and seven respectively, who had been found murdered in a certain field. (Yvonne thought; how well she remembered that field; it was where the little clear-eyed snake had reared up at her, the very day that Jeanne had been thrown out of the house.) Marthe, it seemed, had known the two children quite well, oh, very well; they had often played underneath the window of the farm where their mother had been a servant. They were very healthy children; they made a great deal of noise.

The shock of the discovery of these children's bodies had really been too much for Marthe, especially as the murderer had not been caught, or even suspected. Marthe had found it necessary, for her health's sake, to leave the neighbourhood, as her nerves were much affected, and would Yvonne come and stay with her, to help her get into her new house.

Yvonne did not want to go and stay with her sister; she hated leaving Henri and the children, and the housekeeping, and the gossip and the bustle. But Henri said she must go. "After all," he said, in the voice of one making a discovery, "she is your sister, and you owe her a duty." "I suppose I do," said Yvonne; and then, after a pause, "poor girl, she has had a very dull life, no life at all, as you might say; I ought to do everything I can to cheer her up." So it was arranged that she should go; yet, in spite of the years that had elapsed since Yvonne last saw Marthe, she felt fright-

ened; the weight of that heavy thumb, so curious in the small soft hands of Marthe, was once again upon her shoulder. But she tried to thrust away this numb and clinging fear. She said to herself, "after all, I am a married woman now; I have the advantage, why should I be frightened?" And she bought some new clothes, made in the most outrageous fashions. There was, she knew, something vaguely wrong about these clothes, perhaps in the cut; or it might even be her figure that was at fault; but the clothes came from Paris, Marthe lived in the country; she had never lived anywhere else, she had had no life. She would not know that anything was wrong, and Yvonne felt reassured. But when she was in the train, a fresh feeling of dissatisfaction spread over Yvonne. "There are my clothes," she thought, "and there is the fact that I am a married woman. But what have I to tell Marthe?" And she realised suddenly that, in spite of all, her life had really been as uneventful as that of the lonely spinster, bleaching in that rocky country. There was nothing for her to tell Marthe. She had borne children—yes! But births happen, even in the country. She could speak of her anxiety about the state of her mother-in-law's health; but, even in the country, people are ill. There was Marie's gossip:—ah, there was something for Yvonne to retail! But it was not her own life, Marthe did not know the people concerned, she would not even know their names, and the gossip would mean nothing to her. She would smile in her superior way, and Yvonne would feel like a little girl again. And, as the train swayed, Yvonne thought of the life she had missed. And as she thought of Marthe and the coming ordeal, she made a sudden determination. That scandal about the Député's wife, the hidden lover who had so nearly been discovered by the injured husband, that story should be given to Marthe as *her* story. Those stolen meetings, the jealous husband. Ah, Marthe would open her eyes widely when she heard the story of Yvonne's supposed life.

The station was reached after some hours of travelling, but there was no Marthe to meet Yvonne—only an uncomfortable cart that jolted over the stony landscape for, as it

seemed to Yvonne, an eternity of sameness. She could not help thinking how the countryside resembled Marthe . . . it might almost be that osseous and barren body converted into a different form. Earth instead of humanity. The few plants that grew, as it seemed, on the surface of the land seemed dry as bone. They rattled in the breeze; they were strangely sparse and restricted in their shape, dull, colourless and bloodless in the cool mossy-damp day. Marthe was waiting at the door of the tall white house; she shook hands with Yvonne instead of kissing her; but gave her an extra press from her thumb, by way, Yvonne supposed, of an affectionate greeting. She had grown more silent than ever, for she now spoke scarcely at all. When Yvonne, excited about the murder, tried to speak of it, tried to ask questions, Marthe would not answer. The murder had, so it seemed, distressed and frightened her too much. She would really rather not speak of it . . . and her mouth was thin and hungry. She never looked at Yvonne; her eyes were dulled. Only once, when Yvonne mentioned Jeanne, did Marthe look at her. Then her eyes reminded Yvonne of that terrible, frozen pond, stilled and black even in midsummer, on the bank of which the two murdered children were found. Those eyes, like that pond, were scaled with a reptilian black membrane. But she did not speak.

The day after Yvonne's arrival passed. For events, there were the ticking of the clock in the kitchen, the dribbling of a few drops of mossy-green rain. . . . A fly was caught by a spider. Another fly committed a kind of wild dervish dance on the kitchen ceiling, and fell dead, probably from boredom. The hen laid eggs.

At five o'clock, the two sisters drank coffee in the kitchen, and then it was that Yvonne, hypnotised by Marthe's silence, began her story. Her voice trembled a little, even to herself it sounded unnatural, but she went on and on. This imaginary life of hers was like the life in a penny novelette, as she unfolded it before Marthe. The young and radiant heir of a noble family, blond as an angel, who had threatened to commit suicide for her sake. The presents, the stolen meetings, the jealous husband, the threatened duel. "Ah, my dear, that is Life in Paris! oh, you

country people, you simple hearts, you have no idea!" and she laughed affectedly as she went on with her story. Oh, the hair-breadth escapes. . . . The young blond marionette of her invention, so elegant and unreal, scaling her wall. . . . The sudden return of the husband. Ah! . . . The faintest trace of expression had come to the narrowed eyes that were so carefully averted from her. . . . Was it disgust. Was it interest? But Marthe had smiled. . . . Or was it merely the play of the shadows over her lips? Yvonne became flurried. . . . The billets doux flying like soft white doves, the two wax mannequins meeting beneath the eyes of the fashionable world.

There was nothing now but the ticking sound of Yvonne's automaton talk, cracking the surface of silence—only that and Marthe's eyes. Something was stirring beneath their black, saurian hide. And still Yvonne talked. But even as she spoke, she realised that, though Marthe was listening with a curious intensity, she believed nothing. She was looking at Yvonne for the first time, and her black eyes were mocking at her sister. Marthe knew; she knew; she could read Yvonne's transparent eyes as easily as she could read a flimsy piece of paper. . . . Yvonne's voice died away. She looked up. She looked into Marthe's eyes fully, for the first time. Then she, too, knew, she knew everything. She knew what that flight from the farm had meant, what that silence meant. The children must, indeed, have screamed in vain. Those eyes had watched murder for a million years,—long, long before this life.

In absolute silence the two sisters sat, looking into each other's eyes.

BIBLE BROWN¹

By H. M. TOMLINSON

(From *The Adelphi*)

THAT romantic seaport town of the Orient made him uneasy. He wanted to get away from it. Yet how it had attracted him once—but that was when it was only a fine name on the map of the coast where the Indian Ocean meets the China Sea. Its upheaval of life startled him with a hint that it was without mind, and did not know its power and what it was doing. This life seemed to have no intelligence; it was driven by blind impulse, even to its own destruction. Humanity would go on, without knowing why, and without getting anywhere, till its momentum failed.

He would have to get away from the place. If Christ himself were there he would have to pull a jinrickshaw till he dropped, or sweat from sunrise to dark in an evil barge, even if he were lucky enough to escape one of those many diseases with a course as certain, in that climate, as a spark in tinder. He would have no name, though he had God's last word to men. He would be only a bubble on that broad tide, and when he went out who would notice it on such a flood?

But questions about human life in the East might just as well be addressed to the silent jungle, at the back of the town. That was fecund, coarse, and rank. No way was to be found through it. It climbed for air and light, and clung to its neighbours, glued itself to them and choked them or was choked, coiled in strong sappy lengths, was full of thorns and poisons, though sometimes it had a beautiful blossom and a sweet smell. The seaport was like the jungle. Its people flowing in dense streams incessantly through its streets were moved by powers without more pur-

¹ Copyright, 1924, by H. M. Tomlinson.

pose or conscience than the unseen causes of the jungle and the coral reefs. These Chinese were not men and women, but conflicting torrents. And the white people only appeared to be different. But they were not. They were fewer, and so more noticeable. They were drifting on the same casual flood. They kept themselves cleaner and safer by superior cunning; but they were going the same way, with the same barbarous indifference. Duty was whatever was most pleasant. Beauty was as far as the sunrise and sunset. Conscience was a funny prohibition of freedom. He would have regretted leaving home, only he began to see that the Orient, London, and the jungle, were all driven by the same unknown causes to an undesigned end. Human life had come to the earth, just as fungus comes at a certain incidence of moisture and warmth, and as it would slough when the right focus faded. All these movements of life would slow and stop as unreasonably as they began and continued, and nobody would ever know why.

Some of the men he met there enjoyed it. They preferred life without any restrictions. They quoted Kipling—they were always quoting Kipling. You were broad-minded if you did as you pleased. Places like Malay Street were in the nature of things in the tropics, like hibiscus blossoms and fevers. It was no good expecting tabernacle notions to be helpful in that climate. Nothing mattered in life except to see that you did not get stung through carelessness when taking the honey.

He would have to get out of it. He boarded a little coasting steamer, and then learned she was bound for Bangkok. Anywhere would do. Bangkok would be another heaving pool of men, but there would be an interval of the sea between, which would take some time to cross. He had thought, when he left London, that he was escaping the shadow of the war, which was the shadow of humanity without a head; but either that shadow was everywhere or else it was indistinguishable from his own. She was an old, neat, and homely little steamer. The ss. *Brunei* could have been lowered into the hold of a liner. She might have been a token out of the past of what had been good and

solid. Yet her character would have been plain only to a sailor or an experienced traveller, because her lower deck was a tumult of Malay and Chinese passengers and her crew of natives; and parrots, shouting Chinese stevedores, and cargo hurtling through the air on hooks and slings.

There were four other saloon passengers, English planters and traders. One shared his cabin. That fellow was already occupying it, grunting as he stripped himself, "to get into something dry." The cabin smelt of his acrid body. "I've been ringing for that damn Chinese steward for ten minutes. Seen him about? I want a drink . . . but I know what it is. They're trying to hold me off. I'll have it though, I'll have that drink and another. Bible Brown can't stop me."

"Who's he?"

"Don't you know him? He's the skipper. The only man out here who thanks God at table with his head bowed over tinned food. It's a fact." His cabin mate chuckled while his head struggled with his shirt. "And he's against the booze and the ladies. But I ain't. Not in this God-forsaken world. How does he live?" His cabin mate dropped his heavy bulk suddenly on the settee and began to pull off his drawers.

So he left that small place to his chance companion. The collars, hairbrushes, cigar-boxes, boots, and clothes of that big, prompt, perspiring fellow were scattered over both bunks, the hooks, and the floor. Just forward of the cabin a little man in uniform was leaning over the rail, and in a mild voice was calling some advice to the lower deck. Then the little man turned wearily and absently, but saw him and surveyed him with friendly eyes for a moment in a detachment which seemed to put centuries between them.

"Good-morning. Are you Mr. Royden? I've a parcel for you. Come with me." The little man led young Royden to a door over the top of which was the word Captain. The uproar of the anchorage remained outside that cabin; it might have been an insulated compartment. Over a table by the foreward bulkhead, between two port-windows looking ahead, was a card with a bright floral design round

the text, "Lo, I am with you always." A pair of spectacles rested on a large Bible, which lay beside a blotting-pad covered with shipping documents.

"We shall be leaving in an hour, Mr. Royden. I hope you will be comfortable aboard. She's very small, this ship, and bad when she rolls, but she'll stand anything." The captain looked up at his tall young passenger, and touched his arm in a reassuring way; he seemed tired and grey, as if he were holding on to a task of which now he knew the best and worst. His clipped and grizzled moustache and square chin checked any easy presumption on his good nature which might have been encouraged by his kindly brown eyes. "If you want any books to read, there you are," said the captain. He nodded to a small glass-fronted cupboard. Royden took one step and glanced at the books with interest. Then he shook his head. He would not have shown a smile about it, only when he turned the captain met his look with whimsical amusement. "I thought not," said Bible Brown. "Yet I don't know how I should have lived without them, out here, out here." The captain talked of politics, of the war, and of the affairs of the big town just outside, as though these were matters he had certainly heard about, were matters which experience teaches a man he should expect to meet in this world, and may take his notice for a moment from the real concerns of life. So Royden had been in the war, in France? Yes? He gazed at his passenger thoughtfully for a second, but asked no questions. Royden felt a little indignant. That had been the most awful thing in history; and he had seen it. But this cold little man, with his Bible, thought nothing of human life. That didn't worry him. He didn't care what became of it.

All that day they were passing the land, close in. That coast must have been the same when the earliest navigators saw it. Man had made no impression on it. It had defeated his feverish activities with a tougher and more abundant growth. The sombreness of its forests looked like a sullen defiance. It would give no quarter. The turmoil of humanity at the big seaport from which they had sailed that morning appeared to have less significance than ever. This

jungle, with the least chance, would push that swarm of men and women into the sea again. The day died in flames behind the forest, an appalling spectacle of despairing wrath, as in a final effort, soon quenched, to light an earth abandoned to dark savagery. Let it go.

The *Brunei* was in ultimate night itself, carrying its own frail glints, apparently nowhither. There was nothing in sight. The stars were hidden. There was only the melancholy chant of the surge, the song of the bodiless memory of an earth which has passed. On the lower deck, just showing in the feeble glow of a few lamps hanging from the beams, were what appeared to be a cargo of bundles of coloured rags. Not a sound came from there. Beneath the nearest of the lamps a little child lay asleep on its back beside a shapeless heap of crimson cloth. With its ivory skin it looked as though it were dead, in that light. Its tiny face expressed repose and entire confidence. One arm was stretched out, as though it had reached for something it wanted before it died, but the hand was empty, and the forgetful fingers were half-closed over the palm. On the deck above, the three planters, round a table, were sitting in their pyjamas, drinking. They were not talking. They appeared to have surrendered to everything, after trying to escape together under that one light in ultimate night for company and refuge. They did not look at him.

Royden remembered that the captain had told him he might go up on the bridge whenever he felt like it. He fumbled in the gloom forward of the deck-house for the handrail of the ladder to the bridge, and felt his way up. For a moment he thought nobody was there, that the ship had been left to go where she pleased. Then he saw the head of a Malay, just the head in the darkness, apparently self-luminous, suspended, and with its eyes cast downwards, as though steadfastly contemplating the invisible body it had left. In another moment Royden saw the head was bent over the wheel. Then he heard a mild voice, as though it came from the sea, beyond the ship: "Here I am." The captain was at the extremity of the starboard side of the bridge. The little man was only a shadow even when Royden stood next to him, leaning his arms on the rail,

looking ahead. Neither spoke for some time. Nothing was to be seen ahead. There was no light, and no sea.

"I suppose," said Bible Brown presently, "the other passengers below are drinking."

"Yes. Well, some are sleeping."

The captain made no comment. Royden said, after a pause, "You must get a curious view of us. You see an odd habit or two of ours, for a few days, and then you see us no more."

Still the captain was silent. When he spoke he said, "You are mostly alike. You are simple enough. I know you."

Royden was slightly startled. The old fellow had never seen him before. But he smiled to himself when he thought that these cranks, too, were all alike.

"You are all alike," continued the captain. "I see you once—once or twice—and not again. You cannot help yourselves. . . . Sometimes I wish I could help you, but there is no time. You all know where you are going, and you are gone too quickly."

The complete assurance of the old fellow! But what did he care for humanity after all?

"You are going to Bangkok, Mr. Royden, aren't you?" asked the captain. "Some voyages ago I had a passenger for there. Young like you, but a girl, a child. She had come out from England. She was a little different from the rest of you. I thought she looked like my own daughter. Couldn't make out what she was going to do in a place like that—an innocent girl of about twenty. She asked me some funny questions about Bangkok. I could see she was frightened. Then it came out. A native prince had sent her money, and there she was, going to marry him. Do you know what that means? Well, I told her. Told her how many wives he had already. She cried. She didn't know till then. But do you think I could help her? No, Mr. Royden. She had taken the money, and spent it, and there she was. She said she was forced to do it now. It was her duty. I had to leave her at Bangkok. She was bound to go, she said. . . . Poor little soul."

They both stared ahead. There it was entirely dark.

The sound of the surge, to Royden, was like the droning of his own thoughts. All were drifting. Nobody really knew where they were going, nor why. Not even Bible Brown.

"I can't make out, captain," he said, "how you find your way in a darkness like this."

"Find my way? This darkness is nothing. It is a fine night. I know my course. There is the compass. The darkness is nothing. I keep my course. To-morrow we shall be off Tumpat. I know where I am."

THE MASK OF MICHICHIYO¹

By W. J. TURNER

(A FAIRY STORY)

(From *The Winter Owl*)

THERE lived in the year 1360 in the reign of the Shogun Moto-uji, in the land of Awa, a gardener named Onami, who had two sons. The elder was called Rosei and the younger Michichiyo. Onami was the cleverest of all gardeners in the land of Awa; he was the first to catch water and put mirrors among the hills; he grew the convolvulus, the laurel and the calabash, and princes came from Korea and China to see the bloom of his chrysanthemums as they hung silently upon the hillsides like feather-cloaks left by departing angels.

In the gardens which he made for the Shogun there were pine forests and waterfalls; by the side of miniature lakes stood dark dwarf forests under whose pygmy branches millions of tiny needles crackled beneath the feet of birds. In autumn the noise of their falling was like rain on the sea of Suna. Their branches were no longer than a man's arm, but they were knotted and gnarled with the flight of centuries, and when the moon crept among their reflections in the water they seemed the shadows of crabbed and senile forests growing upon the edge of its craters.

Onami was a stranger in the land of Awa. Men still remembered how some villagers had met him coming down from the mountains, a boy of fourteen and of extraordinary beauty. Under one arm he carried a dwarf cherry tree, under the other a dwarf plum tree. The trees were fully grown and yet no bigger than a gooseberry bush. They were snow-white with blossom and the roar of torrents melting among the hills shook the air between them.

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The villagers stopped, and some had gazed at the boy and some at the trees, for no one in the land of Awa before that time had seen either a dwarf cherry tree or a dwarf plum. The noise of water, the brightness of the blossom and the countenance of the boy filled the valley. A dark, wondering group, the men of Awa stood still in their footsteps.

When they spoke to him he replied in their own tongue, but could only inform them that he had been brought up in a garden in the mountains, and that five days ago he had been instructed to descend into the valley and told that he himself would never return. He knew neither the name of his father nor who had sent him, and when questioned whereabouts the garden lay pointed vaguely up the valley where innumerable white mountain peaks shone in the blue air. One of them had filled the garden with its bright reflection, it was called, he said, *Hatsuyuki: Early Snow*.

With the coming of Onami war ceased in the land of Awa. Not in the memory of the living had there been a spring so beautiful as that which came slowly up from the sea as though to meet Onami descending from the mountains. It came so slowly that the buds on the cherry trees broke one by one; and in a calm tranquillity of light the waves along the beach foamed and hung suspended.

Not a petal dropped from the plum or the cherry. Slowly they grew bright like thousands of moons among the leafless trees, and slowly they waned as the moon wanes in the brightness of the morning sky. The mountains projected into the dreamy air as though they had been hewn by an axe of jade. The yellow-hammer, the warbler and the wren flitted in and out of the leaves along the countryside like motes dancing in a calm sempiternal sunlight. Without a sigh or a ripple of dust, old men sitting at their cottage doors passed away into everlasting silence.

That spring ripened into summer as the youth of the tortoise that lives a thousand years ripens into age; and still it seemed summer when, on a day like another, the autumn deer were heard crying in the mountains. Men listening in the gold sunshine of the lands saw as in a dream those shadows wandering among the trees. They

could not think them real until slowly the leaves began to fall. When winter came by the sea of Suna the wild geese had long flown south, and the land of Awa, now buried in snow, shone among the provinces of Nippon like a white camellia lying in dark water.

The fame of the gardener Onami spread through the world. Men travelled from the remotest countries to learn from him, and the gardens he made for the Shogun Moto-uji were so beautiful that strangers on entering them held their breath in awe. The years passed peacefully in the land of Awa, the seasons fading one into another as though mellowed in the blaze of some far-away splendour; but as Onami grew old the brightness of the cherry trees in the spring grew imperceptibly dimmer, and upon the still magnificence of summer drew an invisible haze.

Onami lived to a great age, and when in his hundred and eighth year he lay dying, the tides of spring and summer, winter and autumn had sunk to their ancient level, and in the minds of men the memory of some far-away splendour lingered with the uncertainty of a dream.

Rosei succeeded his father as head gardener to the Shogun; he was a master among clever gardeners, cunning in hand and stored with rare and curious knowledge; but he was not a gardener like his father. Taciturn and grave in manners, squat and severe in appearance, he was held in great favour by his master the Shogun Yoshimitsu, whose subtle and flexible temper took pleasure in the rigid and unalterably gloomy disposition of his servant.

Rosei was not popular among the people; he lived apart, spending his days in stubborn labour like a man from whom some great marvel has mysteriously departed. In a small bamboo house in a quiet and beautiful corner of the famous gardens that his father Onami had built for Moto-uji, he lived alone with his son Genji. Less than three miles away upon a hill in the same gardens stood the palace of his master Yoshimitsu, who had succeeded Moto-uji as Shogun.

Rosei never spoke of his brother Michichiyo. When Rosei was within a few days of his fifteenth birthday, Michichiyo, who was thirteen months younger, brought to him one spring morning as he sat reading in a room of his

father's cottage a beautiful young tomato plant in a small earthenware pot. Michichiyo said nothing, but Rosei understood that it was his birthday present, and they had gone out together and planted it in the garden by the wall of the house.

There was not a cloud in the sky, and though it was an hour before midday the leaves of the tomato plant began to droop in the still air. They dug a hole in the shade of the wall, and Michichiyo found a watering can and, removing the rose, filled the hole with water. It sank immediately into the ground with an exhalation of indescribable fragrance.

When they had pressed down the earth around the plant and again watered it, Rosei returned eagerly to the coolness of his room. He was reading the story of the battle of Ichni-no-Tani, and had got to the point where Kumagai slays Atsumori near the woods of Ikuta, and finds lying by his side a bamboo flute wrapped in a piece of beautiful brocade. His brother called to him cheerily as he disappeared into the cottage; but, already absorbed in his story, he did not answer. He never saw Michichiyo again.

At this time Michichiyo was well known throughout the villages of Isawa. Slender, his delicate features carved in a strange purity of outline, he moved with the deep tranquillity of a desert flower surrounded by impenetrable mountains. When he passed, men would stop at their work and spellbound gaze at the boy until he was lost to sight, as they would gaze at the sun sinking behind a flower-clad hill. The gates of Yugen would silently fly open. It was the voice of Kalavik, sacred bird of Heaven, that faded upon their ears. . . . When they returned, and looking down saw the spade half-lifted in their hands, or the sheaf still uncut in their grasp, they mechanically completed movements they seemed to have begun thousands of years before.

Three days before Rosei's birthday, on that afternoon when the newly-set tomato plant, now reached by the sun, lay drooping upon the edge of the shallow scooped by their watering, Michichiyo had vanished. In vain he was sought for through all the neighbouring villages and in the

country round. In the thirty years that followed, when working in the gardens, when lying in bed at night, when sitting at table with his son Genji, Rosei was to remember the clear voice of Michichiyo that called to him that morning as he returned impatiently to his reading. He could not remember his brother's words, he could only remember the sound of his voice and how clear and cheerfully it rang.

As the years passed, his grief that he had not replied became more profound. Often when inspecting a freshly-grafted cherry or a new chrysanthemum, his gaze would fall abstractedly into space, and he would see the boy of thirty years ago reading in the shaded room and hear outside in the still sunshine that clear tranquil voice: *Michichiyo!* his lips would frame tremblingly, but not a syllable would shake the petals of the flowers that hung silently about him, tier upon tier in the vast empty beauty of the gardens.

When Genji was about twelve years old he came back to the cottage one day after playing in the gardens, and, lifting the bead curtain, found his father seated within, holding in his hand a mask. By his side lay a scrap of yellow paper, on which Genji, failing to attract his father's attention, read in faded but still quite legible characters: *To my brother Rosei, the mask of Michichiyo.* Genji never knew until then that his father had a brother, but from that day, being a solitary child, he was often to think of him. Whenever, tired of invention that had become too remote and unsubstantial, he put a timid question to his father, Rosei would pause in what he was doing as if to answer, and then sink immediately into an abstraction which Genji feared to disturb, so that, sitting motionless there, he was set day-dreaming too. If at such a moment anyone had chanced to pass, he would have seen father and son, unconscious of the house around them or of the stranger's presence, gazing with open eyes into another world, a world in which neither he, nor the honeysuckle flowers by the doorway, nor the bird that hopped soundlessly across the path, had even a phantasmal existence.

Kantan, or Land of the Pillow, as the people sometimes called the gardens of Onami, was Genji's delight. Before dawn he would leap up from his bed, and by the light

of the stars make his way across the ford and through the lower Pine Forest to Floating Cloud Bridge. The ford was by large circular stones across the first of the five streams that crossed the garden, tributary to the river Isawa, which flowed from east to west for about five miles throughout its whole length. The entire garden was surrounded by a great wall seven feet thick at the base and tapering upwards to a width of about thirteen inches. It was fourteen feet high, so that one man standing upon another's shoulders could not see over the top. There was no entrance to the garden except by the seven river gates, and of these the western gate was least accessible, since to enter it meant going up stream against the current, which, however, was at no time very strong.

On feast days, when the Shogun Yoshimitsu entertained the people, giant barges brightly painted blue and yellow and gay with streamers, carrying thousands of villagers and peasants from the surrounding country, would collect in the river outside the eastern gate long before sunrise. As the stars faded and the sky grew pale above the mountains, the figureheads carved upon the prows threw enlarged shadows upon the river-mists of fire-spitting dragons, hissing serpents folded in gigantic coils, and the staring, wide-mouthed faces of innumerable demons, among whom high out of the water gaped *Aborasetzu* and *Shakāra*, King of the Dragons of the Sea. A low babble of voices came from the multitude assembled in the barges, their pale faces, gathered in thousands against the sides, hanging over the dark river like a bank of flowers reflecting the pallor in the east. In the dim light the smell of water mingled with innumerable scents from the dew-drenched fields. A sudden hush fell upon the multitude as it stared at the ridge of eastern mountains.

A rim of pure gold silently projected above the outline of the earth and streams of ethereal fire poured down all the valleys. A great shout simultaneously went up from the crowded decks, the high carved river-gates swung slowly open and the flotilla of barges and smaller boats with streamers fluttering, to the noise of innumerable flutes, harps and zithers and a babel of voices, floated gaily along the stream into Kantan, Land of the Pillow.

When Genji reached the ford, he would often stop and watch the little ayu leaping in the stream. The water was so clear above its gravel bed that he could see every one of their fins waving. They were always going upstream towards the valley, outside the garden, which entered the northern mountains. He wondered what was the end of their journey, and how many waterfalls they had to jump on their way. Perhaps they went on and on until they came at last to that waterfall, where if they jumped successfully they were turned into dragons—great water-dragons that lived in caves and belched forth wind and rain into the valleys and even ventured sometimes down in the meadows, breathing out before them low rolling clouds of fog and vapour.

Crossing the ford he would enter the Lower Pine Forest. The trees stood tall and silent on either side as he made his way between them, the dry needles crackling under his feet. Through their tops he could see the sky growing brighter and brighter, and now and then he would come into a long lane thinly arched overhead by their branches. Along that dim avenue sank the tiny swirl of his footsteps. Far off in the distance a pine-needle slowly fluttered to the ground.

When he emerged it would often be daybreak. He would run swiftly across the lawns past beds of azaleas and chrysanthemums down to the edge of the lake and up Floating Cloud Bridge, which stretched in a single arch to the Island of Grottos in the middle of the water. On the highest point of the bridge he would sit down, dangling his feet over the water, and watch the sun rise. It would often come slowly over the Eastern Mountains, crawling to some refuge in the sky, a huge, headless dragon, its crimson life-blood gushing out all over the earth.

As Genji sat and watched the moon fade at the end of the valley, and the woods, forests and ridges grow so clear and vivid that he could see the pine branch hanging above the mountain-path and its shadow lying on the ground below, he felt a boundless exhilaration. At each breath he took in miles of air, filling his body with the scent of mountain pines, of ferns trembling in the spray of far-off tor-

rents, of acres of deep dewy meadow grass all bathed in a pure tranquil light into which he floated.

His joy was so intense that presently he longed to give expression to it, and it was then, on one occasion, it flashed into his mind that the ecstasy he was feeling was carved upon the mask of Michichiyo. It came back to him vividly as it hung in his father's room smooth and inscrutable as a wave-worn pebble, but now startling in the calm violence of its hollow eyes and wide-open mouth.

For a moment the divine rapture of Michichiyo dwelt upon the face of Genji. The gold and white blooms of the water-lilies slowly opened in the lake below, the tall purple and yellow iris hung silently in the air and the water waved in undulating lines of gold and silver under the bridge. With a sudden cry of joy Genji kicked off his garments and dived into the lake.

It was the third day of the third month, the day of the Feast of Floating Cups, and for more than three weeks Rosei, as head gardener to the Shogun, had been preparing the grounds for the festival. Hundreds of workmen had been busy erecting marquees and tents on all the lands between the Lower and the Dwarf Pine Forests and from Floating Cloud Bridge to the Lake of Paper Boats. At dawn the eastern river gates had been opened, and a multitude of craft of all colours and shapes had floated along the river into the lake surrounding the temple, where the bow-strings of their masts vibrated in myriad soft musical tones to the bells of the temple. Here they cast their anchors and turned swinging to the breeze with streamers and pennants fluttering. The people, landing in thousands, flocked across the grass to Fourfold Bridge.

Sitting on the emerald terrace of his palace, Yoshimitsu saw the bright-coloured crowds streaming towards the river between the dark of the Upper Pine Forest and the faintly stirring snow-clouds of the Cherry Orchards. On a small jade table before him stood a silver gong, and in his hand he held a stick exquisitely carved with the figures of birds.

The immense expanse of lawn between the Temple lake and Fourfold Bridge was a bright blur of moving figures. When they drew near the bridge Yoshimitsu lifted his stick

and, as the first man stepped on to it, in honour of the arrival of his guests, he arose and struck the gong. Immediately from all the turrets and battlements of the palace were set loose flocks of tasselled doves that soared and circled in the air, the clapping of their wings sounding like a great noise in the sudden silence of the multitude.

For, at the sound of the gong and the rising of Yoshimitsu, the people of the Land of Awa stopped, each man where he was, and lifted a right hand in greeting. Standing alone upon the emerald terrace, Yoshimitsu gravely bowed. From all the tents and marquees scattered over the lawns broke thousands of fluttering flags. The Feast of Floating Cups had begun.

Genji sat in the shade of a black rock at the bottom of a cup-shaped hollow in Dwarf Pine Forest. In the stillness of the heat he could hear the water falling among the miniature lakes; and far off and very faintly the murmur of the people as they wandered over the lawns in and out of the marquees, tasting the tall, coloured ices and the sparkling drinks in which the rivalling cooks of Yoshimitsu strove to surpass one another.

It was early afternoon, and in the burning sun the clamour that had filled the garden all morning had sunk to a darker tone. Weary of swimming, racing and feasting, Genji sat as still as the rock itself against which he leaned. Its irregular black shadow lay sharply against the ground. On all sides the dwarf pine trees projected from the rocky basin into the air, their tiny withered branches thrust crookedly into the bright sunlight. Cut into hard, sharp outlines, patterned with a thousand pygmy trees, stiff and shadeless as crags, that place seemed desolate of hope or promise. Genji lay in it strangely harmonious.

All his old pleasures had become wearisome. He had long since given up going to Floating Cloud Bridge to see the sun rise, and he walked now through the gardens completely indifferent to their beauty. He had looked forward to this festival, hoping that it would arouse him from his dejection, but, although a temporary excitement had lasted through the morning, the reaction had come quickly, and he was sunk in a gloom as profound and pervasive as the sunlight that steeped the rocks about him.

As he sat staring at the lengthening shadows in which he lay, he suddenly became aware that someone had stepped into it straight out of the sunlight. Looking up, he saw an old woman about four feet high with wild, white hair hanging over her thin face. It was, he recognised at once, Yamauba, the fairy of the mountains. Not a twig stirred, not a sound fell in that calm, sun-filled basin. It seemed to him that without moving he spoke to her, but try as he might he could not grasp the meaning of what he was saying. The words faded upon his mind at the very moment they were forming upon his lips. Concentrating with all the energy of which he was capable against what seemed some insuperable barrier, he made an intense sustained effort to hear her speak. Whether her voice was pitched so high that it could reach no human ears or whether it lay so low that only stones and trees could respond to its slow vibrations he could not tell, but he listened in an agony of expectation until, suddenly, he knew that she had finished and—he stared before him into the empty hollow—she was gone.

Everything was as before. The dwarf trees projected into the still, unruffled sunlight. The rocks stood upright among their shadows. The sound of water falling among the miniature lakes grew clear again, and from far away, in one long, slow, returning wave, came back the faint murmur of the multitude. But for Genji everything had changed. Grave and alert, he rose to his feet, brushing the dust from the wide sleeves of his embroidered coat. Then, with one quick glance around him, he began to climb out of the hollow.

As he came out of the forest and began to cross the lawns between the Palace of Yoshimitsu and the Lake of Paper Boats, he saw that the ceremony of Floating Cups had already begun. A wide ribbon of people stretched on both sides of the river from Fourfold Bridge to Floating Cloud Bridge, thickening to a dense cloud around the lake in front of the Palace. Thousands of paper cups in all shades of pink, green, red, yellow and blue were floating down the river from the Upper Pine Forest, and as they passed they were seized by damask-sleeved hands and the contents

drunk to the chanting of impromptu poems. An indescribable gaiety filled the air circling with doves and fluttering with myriads of bright flags.

Without pausing, Genji pressed on towards the auditorium of the Sarugaku no Nō. He had never seen one of these dramatic performances, and he could not have told why he wished to see one now; certainly he had had no intention of going there when he had left home that morning, and he was even dimly conscious of feeling surprised that he should know exactly whereabouts the Nō actors had built their enclosure. He had left the hollow in Dwarf Pine Forest without any definite purpose, and it was only when he had gone some distance that he realised he was walking straight to the Sarugaku auditorium and that he intended to see the performance there.

Genji sat among the spectators motionless, as though he feared that at his slightest breath the scene before him would vanish. In a deep, delicious trance he had watched the fishermen rowing through the storm-swept bay and landing at the pine-woods of Mio. As he heard the words of Hakuryo: *Now I have landed at the pine-wood of Mio and am viewing the beauty of the shore. Suddenly there is music in the sky, a rain of flowers, unearthly fragrance wafted on all sides*, he trembled in every limb; closing his eyes, he heard Hakuryo continue: *These are no common things; nor is this beautiful cloak that hangs upon the pine tree. I come near it. It is marvellous in form and fragrance. This surely is no common dress. I will take it back with me and show it to the people of my home. It shall be a treasure in my house.* Opening his eyes, Genji saw the curtain brushed aside and the Angel slowly entering: *Stop! that cloak is mine. Where are you going with it? This is a cloak I found here. I am taking it home. It is an angel's robe of feathers, a cloak no mortal man may wear. Put it back where you found it. How? Is the owner of this cloak an angel of the sky? Why, then, I will put it in safe keeping. It shall be a treasure in the land, a marvel to men unborn. I will not give you back your cloak.*

*Oh pitiful! How shall I cloakless tread
The wing-waves of the air, how climb
The sky, my home?*

Oh, give it back, in charity give it back!
Genji heard the chorus singing slowly:

*Then on her coronet
Jewelled as with the dew of tears
The bright flowers drooped and faded,*

followed by the voices of Hakuryo and the Angel: *Listen.*

*Now that I have seen you in your sorrow
I yield and would give you back your mantle.*

Oh, I am happy! Give it me then!

*Wait. I have heard tell of the dances that are danced in
heaven. Dance for me now, and I will give you back
your robe.*

*I am happy, happy. Now I shall have wings and
mount the sky again.*

And for thanksgiving I bequeath

A dance of remembrance to the world,

Fit for the princes of men:

The dance-tune that makes to turn

The towers of the Moon,

I will dance it here and as an heirloom leave it

To the sorrowful men of the world.

The Angel took the robes in both hands and slowly began to dance. Genji sighed involuntarily, for there floated from those movements of unearthly beauty a divine exhalation, a fragrance as of water poured out upon the parching earth. A turn of the head brought the mask of the Angel before him. *The mask was the Mask of Michichiyo.*

Centuries ago was that day of the Feast of Floating Cups. As a white colt flashes past a gap in the hedge, even so the days of Rosei and the Shogun Yoshimitsu passed. Generations of men toiled in the fields, and Shogun after

Shogun feasted in the Palace of Yoshimitsu. Then a change came, and the palace crumbled slowly into dust and the gardens returned to their native wildness.

Late one autumn afternoon a priest who had crossed the mountains on a journey through the ancient land of Awa was descending the valley skirting the great Pine Forest. The sun had fallen, and he was still some distance from the nearest village when he came to a heap of stones that looked like the ruins of an ancient wall. Weary from the heat of the day and his long journey, he sat down upon a stone to rest for a little while. As he watched the moon grow ever brighter in the tranquil sky, throwing faint shadows along the ground, a sensation of inexpressible peace and beauty filled his heart. The wild landscape, with its ruined contours bathed in that clear silver light, had an unearthly aspect. Suddenly there was music in the air and a delicious fragrance floated from the sky. Hearing footsteps, he turned and saw a boy of about fourteen, carrying a pail. He beckoned him to approach. What do you call this place? he asked. Onami's gardens, replied the boy, briefly. Onami's gardens! exclaimed the priest, looking around. Why so? They say there were gardens here once upon a time. Ah! It must have been very long ago; let me have a drink from your pail. The boy lifted his pail and brought it towards the priest. Look! there is a moon in your pail! Why, yes, said the boy, gazing down joyously at the water, in which lay a bright silver moon. *It is the Mask of Michichiyo!*

TAMBOURIN CHINOIS¹

By ROMER WILSON

(From *The Weekly Westminster Gazette*)

I

THROUGH a sandy waste, where twisted pine trees rift and whisper in a sea wind, I wander disconsolately; beyond me a desolate seashore, behind me crested mountains. Over the crest of the mountains crawls a huge stone dragon, down to the plain, past the walled city, past the pine groves through which I shuffle, down to the edge of the Yellow Sea. I am overcome with fatigue. I am abashed as if in the presence of a very old hero, for I am aware that I shuffle in the dust of a dead Empire, in the shadow of the wall of Ten Thousand Li.

As I begin to be amazed my gaping mouth snaps tight. I have no stomach for amazement. I am become a Chinaman.

II

Ah! Maï! Maï! I am at home. This and that need repairing, but I do not intend to spend the necessary money. My wife complains that the moth has eaten into her winter coats, and I understand that my youngest nephew has failed in his examination. He cannot pass, it seems, without a present to the examiner, even under the new *régime* at Peking.

I sit on my bed and think it is time they lit the stove beneath it. It is cold this evening. The chrysanthemum plants shiver in the cracked Ming bowls and autumn winds tremble against the lattice. I open a book of devotion and console myself with pious reflections. Life is too short to allow of more than a certain amount of bad luck, and in time even I shall be a guest in heaven. I embroider this

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consolation with a bowl of tea, and soothe my weary spirits with a little opium. The opium charms away my fatigue, and I see the fretted satin of my clothes with a more cheerful eye. Worn clothes seem honourable and becoming, an indication that a man does not waste his substance upon frivolous vanities. I forget that my poverty is the outcome of idle incompetence, I forget that I am a victim of an antiquated system of education, which since the death of the Empire has marked me out as unnecessary. It is as well to do so for the past cannot be re-made. Yet, if I had not met this particular misfortune I should have met another, which probably would have been more disgraceful.

III

At length the opium entertains me with a dream.

It seems to me that I am sitting in a well-furnished apartment in my palace. It is thirty or forty years ago. My success in literature at the Hall of Examination has assured me a magnificent income from a government appointment. It is officially winter, and my new cushions show their red side, but the weather is still warm. I am proud of my autumn-blooming almonds, and dwarf plums, and my collection of bronzes and porcelain flatter my eye, although half of them are borrowed from friends to do honour to an expected visitor.

My guest arrives, and we find mutual gratification in each possessing equal rank. We spend the day in talk, and partake at frequent intervals of tea and sweetmeats. I am able to offer him fine white finger-grapes, persimmons, pears, and a variety of other fruit, and to while away the time until four o'clock we compose poetry. He is more skilful than I, but I have better taste. At four o'clock we dine, and I am not ashamed of my table. His manners are perfect, and at one point, as he offers me a certain dish, he assures me that it his favourite beyond question, and that my acceptance of it is alone required to crown it with perfection.

Thus the day passes pleasantly away, and when at length I bid him farewell, the courtyard is white with moonlight.

IV

Now I imagine myself in Pekin on a delightful occasion. I have purchased a little girl of twelve years from her grandmother. She is as delicate as porcelain, and when they have painted her anew with the hue of the cherry, coiffured her with gold and flowers, and robed her in splendid satins, I find her as refreshing to my senses as a book of accomplished verse. I name her Yehonala secretly to myself after a high personage, and have her portrait taken upon silk. She is docile, and sings as prettily as a nightingale. She delights me; I see that she would charm away many a sluggish hour, but at length I come to the conclusion that it might be more profitable to send her as a gift to the Imperial Palace.

After a thousand tedious, though necessary, ceremonies, which cost me a great deal of money, she goes within the Yellow Precincts, and I return home to meditate upon poverty, and to wait for an honourable distinction in acknowledgement of my little compliment, a distinction which may perhaps fall upon one of my descendants, but which delays to present itself to me.

V

I stay at home and express my disappointment in a sequence of sonnets skillfully turned in the best classical verse. I also plaintively regret my little one in a few good lyrics, and as I attempt to follow her fate with my imagination, I conjure several scenes out of the darkness which cause me apprehension and bring tears to my eyes.

VI

Yehonala quickly adapts herself to the intricacies of court ceremonial, for she has received a good education. She knows that she must lay aside her heart and cease to have any thoughts. She must forget the swallows and the magically warped bamboo, which were her dear companions at home, lest she dim the brilliance of her complexion with

the tears of memory. She is relegated to a low rank among the inferior ladies of the Emperor's Palace, but, of course, finds gratification in the possession of an official title and a dazzling uniform.

VII

Time passes; she becomes the center of honourable and dangerous circumstances. Good luck has preferred her to the Emperor's heart, and to this introduction he has been pleased secretly to give his Imperial sanction.

He comes to her gaunt and terrible, like a hero in an old romance. His silence is appalling and mysterious. It is the silence of lonely places, and when he sighs against her long black hair she remembers the dying breeze in autumn tree tops. She gazes terrified upon his pale countenance, and does not understand that he loves her. Though he stays long in the moonlit pavilion she thinks his attentions are part of the court ceremonial which wraps the whole earth in a cloak. Undoubtedly she is wedded to heaven. She believes that nothing is hidden from his Imperial eyes, and dare not shudder even when she is alone. Yet songs quiver in the Emperor's heart though he neither expresses nor hears them. He is unskilled in human tenderness. He does not suppose that a woman has any feelings. The sun sets at his command behind the acacias, he summons the moon out of her mountain pavilion, and when night shuts close the windows of the day, he is conveyed in strict invisibility to the Western Summer-house.

VIII

It is no surprise to him to find Yehonala dead upon one of his secret visits. His female relatives do not permit his pleasures to gather too often in the same locality. He sighs wearily, and death draws from his heart words which life had not the power to call forth. When death comes as a sudden guest he finds us unprepared; we fall into confusion. lose countenance, and stammer a great many thoughts we had no intention of uttering.

IX

In his grief the Emperor improvises the following ode, for the Son of Heaven is by birth a poet, and has, moreover, an inexhaustible knowledge of the classics, from whence he plucks at will suitable adornments for his stanzas.

X

"Why did you leave me Yehonala? Why did you leave me without intimation or farewell?

"They offered me many golden cups, but I prefer the choice wine which a friend sent me in a humble flagon.

"The flagon is wantonly broken because somebody has discovered my pleasure in it.

"Even now Sweet Almond-Flower the little memory of you fades from me.

"You are inconsiderate to be so hasty.

"You do wrong to slip from my side at the first beckoning of another hand without even permitting me to catch hold of your shadow.

"You found no pleasure in my company perhaps?

"I was too grave, or my habitual silence frightened you.

"I was taught to despise the manners of the peach-blossom and knew no tender words.

"Early in youth pleasure was taken from me, and I fell ill of sorrow.

"When I visited you secretly you trembled as these petals of your headdress tremble against my forsaken hand.

"Little Golden Shower, you should have recalled delight to me in the absence of my Imperial person.

"Now it is too late. You have deserted me and slipped silently away to the Nether Springs.

"You have mocked me, and also the Emperor, for in your hastiness to escape me, you have forsaken this little pavilion without his Imperial decree."

**THE YEARBOOK OF THE BRITISH
AND IRISH SHORT STORY
JUNE, 1923 TO JUNE, 1924**

THE BEST BRITISH SHORT STORIES

JUNE 1, 1923, TO MAY 31, 1924

NOTE. Only stories by British and Irish authors are listed. American as well as English periodicals have been reviewed.

ADAMS, B. M. G.

Uncle Bertram. Transatlantic Review. March.

ALLISON, JAMES MURRAY.

Evening With Mr. Williams. English Review. September, 1923.

Man With the Spiked Moustache. Illustrated Review. August, 1923.

Mr. Franklyn's Adventure. London Mercury. November, 1923.

"ARLEN, MICHAEL."

Ace of Cads. Royal Magazine. March.

Broken Nose. Everybody's Magazine. December, 1923.

Dancer of Paris. Everybody's Magazine. February.

Ghoul of Golders Green. Sketch. Christmas Number, 1923.

Lark Among Crows. Royal Magazine. August, 1923. Everybody's Magazine. January.

One Gold Coin. Magpie. Christmas, 1923.

Vermilion Orchid. Home Magazine. September, 1923.

ARMSTRONG, MARTIN.

Mrs. Lovelace. London Mercury. March.

AUMONIER, STACY.

Fall. Hutchinson's Magazine. July, 1923.

Kidnapped General. Strand. August, 1923.

Most Wonderful Thing in the World. Hutchinson's Magazine, September, 1923.

Mother of Carmen Colignon. Sphere. November 26, 1923.

Overheard. John o'London's Weekly. December 8, 1923.

Packet. Story-Teller. December, 1923.

What Chen Lin Stole From His Neighbour. Cassell's Magazine. May.

Within the Shadow of a Memory. Metropolitan. May. (Same as "The Mother of Carmen Colignon.")

AUSTIN, F. BRITTEN.

On the Boulevard. London Magazine. August, 1923.

BARKER, GRANVILLE.

God of Good Bricks. Century. May.

BENNETT, ARNOLD.

During Dinner. Cassell's Magazine. October, 1923. Hearst's International. November, 1923.

- BENNETT, ROLF.**
 Bill Grimes His Soul. English Review. September, 1923.
 Bishop's Ring. English Review. March.
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 Boxing Night. Tatler. November 30, 1923.
 Expiation. Hutchinson's Magazine. November, 1923.
 Face. Hutchinson's Magazine. February.
 Naboth's Vineyard. Hutchinson's Magazine. December, 1923.
- BERESFORD, J. D.**
 Justice. Adelphi. May.
- BERMAN, HANNAH.**
 Charity Box. Dublin Magazine. August, 1923.
- "BIRMINGHAM, GEORGE A."**
 Independent State. Empire Review. August, 1923.
- BLACKWOOD, ALGERNON.**
 Man Who Was Milligan. Pearson's Magazine. (London.) November, 1923.
- BOND, JESSICA.**
 Last Train. T. P.'s and Cassell's Weekly. January 5.
- BOWEN, MARJORIE.**
 Avenging of Ann Leete. New Magazine. December, 1923.
 Miss Moss. Hutchinson's Magazine. October, 1923.
- BOYD, DONALD.**
 Primavera. Manchester Guardian. November 16, 1923.
- BULLETT, GERALD.**
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 Crash! T. P.'s and Cassell's Weekly. December 8, 1923.
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 Freddie Comes Back. Vanity Fair. August, 1923.
 Top of the Stairs. T. P.'s and Cassell's Weekly. March 1.
- BUTTS, MARY.**
 Deosil. Transatlantic Review. March, 1924.
- CARLYLE, F.**
 Mary's Child. Time and Tide. November 23, 1923.
- CHAMBERS, ROBERT HUSTED.**
 Snows of Yesteryear. English Review. October, 1923.
- CHESTERTON, G. K.**
 Dagger with Wings. Nash's Magazine. February. Hearst's International. February.
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 Oracle of the Dog. Nash's Magazine. December, 1923. Hearst's International, December, 1923.
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 Poor Dear Peter. Eve. August 29, 1923.
- CLIFTON, THELMA.**
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- CONRAD, JOSEPH, and HUEFFER, F. M.
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- COPPARD, A. E.
Alice Brady. Saturday Review, May 24.
Art of Life. Now and Then. October, 1923.
Handsome Lady. Century. November, 1923.
Higgler. Transatlantic Review. May.
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Spirit That Could Not Rest. Metropolitan. November, 1923.
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- DICBY, BASSETT.
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- GILKES, MARTIN.
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- HUDSON, STEPHEN.
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NOTE. Capital letters are employed to indicate the author of an article.

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- GARNETT, DAVID.**
 Harvey O'Higgins. *Nation*. (London) August 4, 1923. (33:576.)

- GARNETT, EDWARD.**
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May 17. (35:207.)
- GEORGE, W. L.**
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- Gerould, Katharine Fullerton.**
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- GOLDING, LOUIS.**
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- HUNTER, REX.
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London, Jack.

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LUCAS, F. L.

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- MECROZ, R. L.
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- Melville, Herman.
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- Morand, Paul.
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 By Orlo Williams. *Cornhill*. September, 1923. (268.)
- Poe, Edgar Allan.
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Elizabeth Bowen. *Nation*. (London) June 9, 1923. (33:336.)
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- Sackville-West, V.
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JUNE 1, 1923 TO MAY 31, 1924

NOTE. An asterisk before a title indicates distinction. The name of the American publisher follows in parentheses.

I. ENGLISH AUTHORS

- ADAMS, B. M. G. *England. Paris: Three Mountains Press.
 ARLEN, MICHAEL. *These Charming People. Collins. (Doran.)
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 AUMONIER, STACY. *Miss Bracegirdle and Others. Hutchinson.
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 BELL, J. J. Some Plain—Some Coloured. Hodder and Stoughton.
 BENNETT, ROLF. *Round the Next Corner. Bles.
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 BERESFORD, J. D. *The Imperturbable Duchess. Collins.
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 BULLETT, GERALD. *The Street of the Eye. Lane.
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 CALTHROP, DION CLAYTON. Rose-Coloured Spectacles. Mills and
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 CASTLE, AGNES and ECERTON. Enchanted Casements. Hutchinson.
 COPPARD, A. E. *The Black Dog. Cape. (Knopf.)
 DANE, CLEMENCE. *Wandering Stars. Heinemann. (Macmillan.)
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- HAYES, COURTNEY. *Witchery o' the Moor*. Jenkins.
HICHENS, ROBERT. *The Last Time*. Hutchinson. (Doran.)
HINE, MURIEL. *Stories of Love and Laughter*. Lane.
HOBSON, CORALIE. **In Our Town*. Hogarth Press.
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LE FANU, J. SHERIDAN. *In a Glass Darkly*. Eveleigh Nash. *Madame Crowl's Ghost*. Bell.
LE QUEUX, WILLIAM. *Bleke the Butler*. Jarrolds.
LOWNDES, MRS. BELLOC. *Why They Married*. Heinemann.
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MOSS, GEOFFREY. **Defeat*. Constable. (Boni and Liveright.)
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STERNE, ASHLEY. *Twisted Tales*. Nisbet.
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WALPOLE, HUGH. **Jeremy and Hamlet*. Cassell. (Doran.)
WILLIAMS, VALENTINE. *Clubfoot the Avenger*. Jenkins. (Houghton Mifflin.)
WOOLF, H. J. *First Meetings*. Guethary, France: Lykos Press.
WYLIE, I. A. R. **Side Shows*. Cassell.

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- ABDULLAH, AHMED. *Alien Souls*. Hutchinson.
- ANDERSON, SHERWOOD. **Horses and Men*. Cape. (Huebsch.)
- BEACH, REX. *Big Brother*. Hodder and Stoughton. (Harper.)
- BERCOVICI, KONRAD. **Love and the Gypsy*. Eveleigh Nash. (Boni and Liveright.)
- BIERCE, AMBROSE. **In the Midst of Life*. Eveleigh Nash. (Boni and Liveright.)
- CANFIELD, DOROTHY. **Hillsboro People*. Cape. (Holt.)
- COOPER, COURTNEY RYLEY. *Jungle Behind Bars*. Jenkins.
- FERBER, EDNA. **Gigolo*. Heinemann. (Doubleday, Page.)
- GEROULD, KATHARINE FULLERTON. **Conquistador*. Harrap. (Scribner.)
- GLASGOW, ELLEN. **Dare's Gift*. Murray. (Doubleday, Page.)
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- LONDON, JACK. *Dutch Courage*. Mills and Boon. (Macmillan.)
- Marriage. *Short Stories of Married Life by American Writers*. Hodder and Stoughton. (Doubleday, Page.)
- MARSHALL, EDISON. *The Heart of Little Shikara*. Hodder and Stoughton. (Little, Brown.)
- NORRIS, KATHLEEN. *The Callahans and the Murphys*. Heinemann. (Doubleday, Page.)
- O'BRIEN, EDWARD J., *editor*. *Best Short Stories of 1923*. II. American. Cape. (Small, Maynard.)
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- SMITH, WALLACE. **Little Tigress*. Putnam. (Putnam.)
- TERHUNE, ALBERT PAYSON. *The Further Adventures of Lad*. Hodder and Stoughton.
- TRAIN, ARTHUR. *Tut, Tut! Mr. Tutt*. Nash and Grayson. (Scribner.)
- WINSLOW, THYRA SAMTER. **Picture Frames*. Constable. (Knopf.)
- YEZIERSKA, ANZIA. *Children of Loneliness*. Cassell. (Funk and Wagnalls.)

III. TRANSLATIONS

- BUNIN, IVAN. (*Russian.*) *Fifteen Tales. Secker. (Knopf.)
 COUPERUS, LOUIS. (*Dutch.*) *Eighteen Tales. F. V. White.
 FISCHER, MAX and ALEC. (*French.*) Estelle. Philpot.
 FLAUBERT, GUSTAVE. (*French.*) *Three Tales. Chatto and Windus.
 GOGUL, NIKOLAY. (*Russian.*) *The Overcoat. Chatto and Windus.
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 KALLAS, MADAME AINO. (*Finnish.*) *The White Ship. Cape.
 (Knopf.)
 MORAND, PAUL. (*French.*) *Open All Night. Chapman and
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 NERVAL, GERARD DE. (*French.*) *Daughters of Fire. Heinemann.
 (Nicholas L. Brown.)
 PROSPERI, CAROLA. (*Italian.*) Passions and Pinpricks. Philpot.

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